

Dissenting Voices

Volume 1 | Issue 1

8-21-2012

Dissenting Voices Volume 1 Issue 1 (Spring 2012) Complete Issue

Women and Gender Studies Senior Seminar at The College at Brockport

Repository Citation

Women and Gender Studies Senior Seminar at The College at Brockport (2012) "Dissenting Voices Volume 1 Issue 1 (Spring 2012) Complete Issue," *Dissenting Voices*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/dissentingvoices/vol1/iss1/1>

This All Voices is brought to you for free and open access by the Women and Gender Studies at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissenting Voices by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmyers@brockport.edu.

DISSENTING VOICES

Volume 1

Issue 1

2012

**The Undergraduate Journal of the Senior Seminar in
Women and Gender Studies at The College at Brockport**



COVER: “Enter Death, Exit Cure” is a visual representation of the words and thoughts of someone struggling with the idea that the body that they want is so far away, it may as well be a god. Created by Johnny Sparrow.



COVER: “Enter Death, Exit Cure” is a visual representation of the words and thoughts of someone struggling with the idea that the body that they want is so far away, it may as well be a god. Created by Johnny Sparrow.



Dissenting Voices

Volume 1, Issue 1
Spring 2012

Table of Contents

Opening Voices

Editor's Note	1
<i>Barbara LeSavoy, PhD, Director, Women and Gender Studies</i>	
Founders' Statement	2
<i>Em Scrivani, WMS '12, and Sherly Urena, WMS, ENG, '12</i>	
Queering Western Feminism Idealism	3
<i>Sherly Urena, Spring '12 Women and Gender Studies Senior Scholar</i>	
Little Songs of Long Ago: A Concoction of New and Old Verse	13
<i>Mel Kelsey, Spring '11 Jennifer M. Lloyd Women and Gender Studies Essay Prize Winner</i>	
Transnational Discourses on Gender Variance	29
<i>JC Acosta, Spring '12 Harriett Whitney Award Recipient</i>	
Derrida, Difference, and Intelligences: Accessible Theory and its Necessity for Feminism	40
<i>Em Scrivani, Spring '12 Recognition, Contribution to the Women and Gender Studies Discipline</i>	

More Voices

GLBTQ Bullying.....	44
<i>Martin Green, Spring '12 Women and Gender Studies Student Leadership Award Recipient</i>	
Parenting from the Margins.....	52
<i>Jessica Sullivan, Fall '10 Elaine K. Miller Women and Gender Studies Scholarship Recipient; Spring, 12 Harriett Whitney Award Recipient</i>	
Disciplining the Body: Excessive Exercise Disorder	60
<i>Jessica Velez, Fall '11 Elaine K. Miller Women and Gender Studies Scholarship Recipient</i>	

Silence Because of Fear	66
<i>Sara Rolls</i>	
Fat Body Politics	72
<i>Jeri Coleman</i>	
Medicine and Transgender Identities	78
<i>Johnny Sparrow</i>	
Sexual Assault on College Campuses	88
<i>Brittney Rowe</i>	
Anti-Trans Hatred in the Name of Feminism	96
<i>Max Kurzdorfer</i>	

Editorial Board

Executive Editor

Barbara LeSavoy, PhD, The College at Brockport

Managing Editor

Pat Maxwell, MLS, The College at Brockport

Editorial Board

Amber A. Humphrey, MA, The College at Brockport

Jennifer M. Lloyd, PhD, Associate Professor Emerita, The College at Brockport

Barbara Mitrano, EdD, The College at Brockport

Megan L. Obourn, PhD, The College at Brockport

Opening Voices

Note from the Editor

I am thrilled to launch this first edition of *Dissenting Voices*, a student engineered eJournal collaboratively designed, authored, and published by undergraduate Women and Gender Studies majors in connection with their Women and Gender Studies Senior Seminar at the College at Brockport.

Dissenting Voices grows out of a course learning structure through which Women and Gender Studies students could reflect upon their undergraduate experience in the discipline, and through engagement, activism, and synthesis of acquired knowledge, establish a theoretical foundation to inform future feminist practices. Course readings comprised students' discipline-specific interests, enabling an intellectual forum in which majors dialogued on a women and gender focused topic. This work culminated in a meaningful capstone project grounded in contemporary and emerging feminist scholarship.

This first volume of *Dissenting Voices* advances an array of topics important to the Women and Gender Studies discipline as examined by diverse student voices and as presented in shifting palates from art to poetry to traditional essay. Four opening pieces showcase the volume where leading authors consider *Queering Western Feminism*, fashioned in zine layout; *Reproductive Freedoms*, interrogated in rhyme; *Transnational Discourses on Gender Variance*, theorized in a scholastic essay; and *Derrida, Language, and Feminisms*, captured as a blog excerpt.

Continuing with more voices, eight submissions, varied in scope and canvas, address *GLTBQ Bullying*, *Parenting from the Margins*, *Excessive Exercise Disorder*, *Rape*, *Fat Body Politics*, *Medicine and Transgender Identity*, *Sexual Violence*, and *Transphobia*.

Collectively, journal topics span issues organic to college campuses and surrounding communities. In broader strokes, they call into question contested gender equity measures overlaying home and nation. *Dissenting Voices* preserves the authenticity of student voice, sanctioning a wide range of ability and talent as engendered within students' senior seminar coursework.

In my early role as Brockport's Women and Gender Studies Director and faculty developing and instructing a new Women and Gender Studies senior capstone course, I had what seemed a pipedream in conceptualizing a student journal. Semesters of dynamic student activism and thought inspired me to imagine a women and gender studies publication that would bring to light undergraduate creative agency realized on the cusp of feminist knowledge.

Dissenting Voices, as named and populated by its 2012 student founders, is this dream forward.

Barbara LeSavoy, PhD
Director, Women and Gender Studies
Executive Editor, *Dissenting Voices*

Founders' Statement

Our primary purpose in creating this journal was to construct an arena that facilitated the reflection of our feminist journeys, making connections between disconnected identities. Our hope is that Dissenting Voices becomes a beacon of change, a mechanism of interchange for scholar activists from across the diverse spectrum of identity within our discipline. The publication of the first issue and the completion of the design for this journal is not the culmination of our journey. Rather, this publication demands that we utilize our creativity, diverse backgrounds and academic interests to engage in topics that are as problematic as they are crucial in the hopes that Dissenting Voices transcends our scholarship. We have made every effort to build a community that is inclusive of all people, to have a permanent impact, and to share our activism by spreading our knowledge, but we do realize that our scholarship is both transient and fluid. The completion of this journal and the publication of the first issue is only the beginning of our vision. Gazing into the future, we recognize the continued need for a compelling voice that declares the universal accessibility and opportunities that feminism and feminist activism offers for everyone. We hope that Dissenting Voices will be an activist tool for the exploration of feminism and gender equality now and into the future.

Em Scrivani, WMS '12

Sherly Urena, WMS, ENG, '12



(Evans, 2011)



(Castro-Mendivil, 2009)



(Global Feminism)



(Freedom of Speech)



(Rosie the Riveter)



Introduction

This Zine focuses on drawing attention to the argument surrounding western feminism and its somewhat idealistic approach to the “rest of the world’s” feminism. This Zine examines these ideas by presenting one of the main arguments surrounding this divide; this Zine also features feminists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Mohanty. Although feminism is a great way to have women’s status in the world evaluated, there are still many conflicting and delegitimizing practices conducted within feminist circles on a daily basis.



(American 2nd wave feminism)

Feminism

- The social, political, and economical equality of the sexes
- The radical notion that women are people too

Feminist Back Story

Feminism is usually broken down into three waves. The first wave, in the early 1900s, came with the suffrage movement; the second wave, during the 1960s and 70s, focused on race, class, and sexual equality; and the third wave, from the 1990s to today, is an evolving movement with diversity in identity and voice at its core.

My Opinion

- Anyone can be feminist and it is not only for women.
- Feminists are not men-hating, bra-burning, ultra-radical, upper class women.
- Feminists come in all shapes and sizes. They all have varied amounts of intelligence, body hair, money, etc.

Something to Think About

Do you believe all people should have equal opportunities? Do you believe that someone who happens to be superior in a specific situation should not take advantage of someone who is weak in a certain situation? Do you believe an increase in domestic violence is wrong? Then you may want to learn more about feminism and may even want to identify as one yourself.

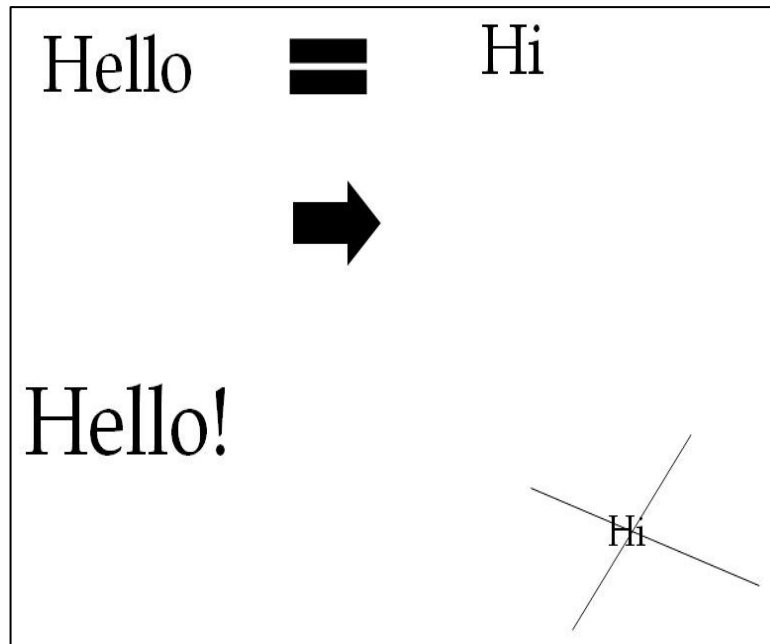
Basic Argument

Feminism should have its own sections; people are entitled to their own space and their own voices. (Meaning no one in a free society should take away someone else's voice or identity.)

VERSUS

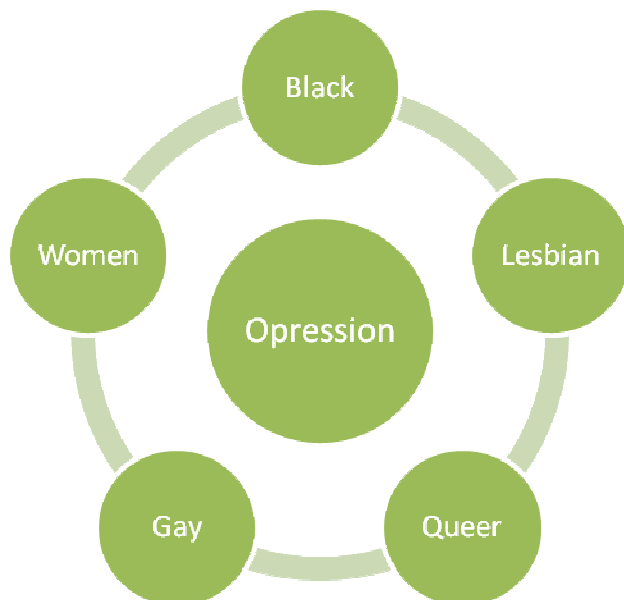
Different branches of feminism continue to separate and isolate feminists from one another. (Meaning the more feminists seem to branch off, the more divided and eventually at odds they seem to be.)

Explanation



This chart represents my take on the act of exclusion and the delegitimizing of other spaces. If you use the word "Hello" or "Hi" you are choosing to use one of those words at that very moment. This does not mean that there is something wrong with the word you did not choose or that one must be chosen over the other. However, when you chose either "hello" or "hi" and chose only that word and begin to say that that statement is the correct statement and the other word must never be chosen, then that is problematic.

Another way of looking at this argument is by using this chart. The interlinked circles are the basic titles to some of the important branches of feminism. Each of these branches came from being excluded and/or delegitimized from/by another branch. For example, the Queer movement spawned from exclusion within the Lesbian/Gay political movements. At the center of the chart is oppression. It is oppression that both unites and separates these circles. All of the branches represented in the chart deserve their own space and voice, but at what cost?



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a self-identified “Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist” (Lahiri, 2011) and the author of the essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). In this essay, Spivak raises many important points about the state of western feminism. Spivak writes about people who are considered natives from third world countries. Spivak also talks a lot about what classifies the Other and the inconsistency western imperialists have with this classification. Her work focuses largely on Sati women and

how we, in the western world, seem to be getting our ideas about these women from everyone except the actual women themselves. Spivak states:

...covered over by an alien legal system masquerading as Law as such, an alien ideology established as only Truth, and a set of human sciences busy establishing the 'native' as self-consolidating Other (1985, p. 254).

Here, Spivak is arguing that imperialists tend to use their privilege and power to establish their rules, values, and ideologies mostly reproducing what they have been taught. Using this western lens, they then label the Other as inferior and never to be considered as equal to the people in power.

While significant in informing knowledge on global feminism, Spivak’s (1988) essay is often read as alienating, because she states her arguments using complex language and ideas that are difficult to understand even by people who are intimate with feminist theory and practice. In this way Spivak is sometimes seen as reinforcing masculine hegemony, because she elevates herself to the alienating nature of purely academic writing constructed within scholastic male dominated circles. Still, others have combated this argument, saying that this sophisticated thinking is the way in which Spivak is recognized as an accomplished scholar.

Additionally, since we are operating within patriarchy, we can use patriarchal tools, because that is the template we have. We must collude with patriarchy as a means to combat the hegemony that is inherent in our society. Similar arguments are present in works such as Letherby's *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice* (2003). Letherby talks about our male dominated culture and the fight among feminists to fit within these academic circles, which use patriarchy as a template to change male dominated institutions.

Chandra Mohanty



(Evans, 2011)

Chandra Mohanty is a transnational feminist. In her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003), Mohanty critiques feminism for its implied ideas about feminism in non-western countries. Mohanty attacks so-called “western” feminism and the labels “first” and “third” world. According to Mohanty, “western” feminism is overly concerned with its own agendas and way of thinking

about feminism without stopping to take into account other ways of combating other types of feminism and feminist issues. This in itself is an important contribution to “western” feminism, because many people take these ideas for granted, inherently believing that “western” feminism is the only true feminism and that other countries should adhere to these western ways. This thinking is exemplified by the author’s use of quotation marks around the words “first world”, “third world”, and “western,” emphasizing that these are problematic terms that are not necessarily universally used and understood.

Mohanty goes on to say it is noteworthy that “western” feminism is seen as universal and inherent even though “western” feminism itself is divided and often lacks internal coherence and consistency. Importantly, Mohanty affirms that “western” feminist discourse often classifies non-western feminism as “the other.” This implies that “westerners” are not the other, thereby creating a binary, and by default, a problematic divisiveness. It is these types of dichotomies that the feminist movement has been trying to combat. This is significant because, as Mohanty also points out, “third” world scholars then use these discourses to write about and critique themselves, applying narrowly defined categories and ideas that “western” feminism has laid before them. Such practices thereby reproduce patriarchy itself because they perpetuate the dominant ideas that have been passed off as the correct and only way to think about feminism.

Possible Solutions:

Global Feminism: a term “derived from the practices and concerns of feminist activists and scholars of feminist activism around the world” (Ackerly& Attanasi, 2009). It is a global movement concerned with combining many different feminist perspectives and applying them on a global scale. Global feminism is sometimes referred to as transnational feminism and postcolonial feminism. All have similar ideas and goals. Global Feminism is a great start when attempting to tackle the division and inconsistency within feminism. If many different feminist experiences and knowledge would align themselves with the project, the better the outcome would be. Ackerly& Attanasi (p. 545) state many reasons why global feminism is important. According to the authors, this feminism concerns itself with and unites all injustices around the world; it takes into account all experiences from different oppressed groups around the world and tries to combat these injustices by pulling from many different resources. Global feminism seems to focus on women and can place heavy importance on labels, which is problematic because this can lead to further delegitimizing and segregation if the labels form new hierarchies of importance that in turn displace the feminist mission.

Queering Feminism: a self-proclaimed term used to describe the idea that by taking practices that occur in queer spaces and applying them on a larger scale, feminists could start to combat some of the segregation and delegitimizing practices within itself. Queer theory is a relatively new field of study. Steven Seidman (2001), in his article “From Identity to Queer Politics”, states: “Whereas gay identity politics aims to normalize being gay, queer politics struggles against normalizing any identity” (p. 326). This means that instead of enabling change for one group of people, we should concern ourselves with bringing about change for all oppressed groups. This would provide us with an interesting way of bringing everyone together while still acknowledging diversity and difference. That is because queer is a term that is universal but also has variety within itself; all queers choose to unite themselves with this label. This is distinct from saying something along the lines of, “we are all different but are all feminist”, because unlike feminists, most queers acknowledge their differences and accept them as a piece of queer space. Conversely, some feminists question what counts as feminism and tend to develop hierarchies of the “most feminist” versus the “least feminist.”

References

- Ackerly, B & Attanasi, K. (2009). Global feminisms: Theory and ethics for studying gendered injustice. *New Political Science*, 31(4), 543-555.
- Chandra, M. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Lahiri, B. (2011). Speaking to Spivak. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-literaryreview/article1160716.ece>
- Letherby, G. (2003). *Feminist research in theory and practice*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Seidman, S. (2001). From identity to queer politics: Shifts in normative heterosexuality and the meaning of citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 5(3), 321-28.
- Spivak, G. C. (1985). Three women's texts and a critique of imperialism. *Critical Inquiry*, 12(1), 243-261.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Image Credits

#3127 *Judging Spivak* [photograph]. Meme generator. Retrieved from:

<http://memegenerator.net/instance/10628340>

American 2nd wave feminism [photograph]. Retrieved from:

<http://madgiak.edublogs.org/2012/02/27/history-of-feminism-part-2/>

Castro-Mendivil, E. (2009). *International day for elimination of violence against women*

[photograph]. Retrieved from:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/73983071@N02/6681141799/>

Evans, M. (2011, January 6). *Cruel culture* [cartoon]. Local affairs gallery. Retrieved from:

<http://www.evanscartoons.com/image.php?id=1294733061>

Freedom of speech [photograph]. Retrieved from:

<http://globalpoliticalawakening.blogspot.com/2010/11/is-freedom-radical-idea.html>

Global feminism [illustration]. Retrieved from:

http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_0PIty7uAOIw/SfJsuZyk1rI/AAAAAAAAAH/C5yiJlcs4D8/s1600/global+feminism.gif

Hang in there. We will free you [cartoon]. Retrieved from:

http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lb2zvJUftE1qeo8kqo1_500.jpg

International Womens' Day [image]. Retrieved from:

<http://www.internationalwomensday.com/linkto.asp>

Rosie the Riveter [photograph]. Women in war jobs. Retrieved from:

<http://www.adcouncil.org/Our-Work/The-Classics/Women-in-War-Jobs-Rosie-the-Riveter>

Further Reading

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York:

Routledge.

Johnson, A. G. (2006). *Privilege, power, and difference*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Valenti, J. (2007). *Full frontal feminism: A young woman's guide to why feminism matters*.

Emeryville, CA: Seal Press.

Little Songs of Long Ago



A concoction of new and old verse

Written by: Melissa Kelsey

Contents

Ring Around the Rosy...

Row Row Row Your Boat...

Jack and Jill...

Mary Mary Quite Contrary...

Little Miss Muffet...

Humpty Dumpty...

Little Teapot (An Ode to Rush Limbaugh)...

Hickory Dickory Dock...

Little Bo-Peep...

Mary Had a Little Lamb...



oe is dẽcomposing
r̃ligious right, imposing
thẽ massẽs, thẽ massẽs
if wẽ'd all spit thẽn thẽy'd drown.





oe Roe Roe v. Wade

slipping through the cracks~

wearily wearily wearily wearily

we're not going back!



Jack and Jill both need a pill
and for what, it shouldn't matter-
but they're in Arizona, and allow me to warn ya
some pills aren't allowed for the latter.
If you are Jack, no health care you lack
but uterus owners take heed-
your body's the site, for attacks from the right
on the birth control options you need.





ary Mary popped her cherry
and then she missed her flow-
abstinence sex education
left her with nowhere to go.





ittle Miss Muffet had had enough of it~
watching her rights chipped away.

Laws more imposing, so the clinics were closing~
women harassed at the gates.

Now Miss Muffet's a fighter
with all of her fiber

she knows there's no time to waste~
access must be equal, free to all people
regardless of class, gender, race.





An egg attached to my uterine wall,
A political chip in a gambling hall-
The republicans shriek, the democrats bend-
Who can we count on our rights to defend?!





'm a little sexpot
there's no doubt,
too much sex to handle
government, help me out-
no control when I'm worked up
I'm such a slut!
that's what birth control's about.





Hickory dickory dock

they want to turn back the clock~

to when abortions were none

so our fight is not done~

cause the doors of the clinics are blocked.





those anti-choice creeps

have got us in deep-


and we know where to find 'em.

We can't leave 'em alone-

we refuse to stay home

our chants will serve to remind 'em.





Mary called her Uncle Sam
to shake up the status quo~
With every message Mary left
her anger seemed to grow.
Petitions signed, donations paid
what else could Mary do?
Uncle Sam had many aids
to filter complaints through.

Now Mary is a radical, effective tools we need~
The system is not capable, the people need to lead.
Uncle Sam's not one of us and never will provide~
We have to take, and fight we must!
Standing side by side.



Sources

Alchin, L.K. Rhymes.org.uk (Nursery Rhymes lyrics and Origins) Retrieved from <http://www.rhymes.org.uk>

Denslow, W. W. (1901). *Denslow's mother goose : Being the old familiar rhymes and jingles of mother goose*. (p. 14, 16, 36, 58, 66, 70-72). New York: McClure, Phillips. Retrieved from <http://leen.loc.gov/01025765>

Sanders, G.H. (1939). The teapot song [R.Kempner]. [sheet music]. New York : Kelman Music Corporation.

Smith, S. (2005). *Women and socialism: Essays on women's liberation*. (pp. 52-92). Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Willebegg le Mair, H. (1912). *Little songs of long ago: More old nursery rhymes*. (cover image). New York: A&C Black. Retrieved from <http://leen.loc.gov/88753353>

[Bunting and 16th century letters]. Retrieved April 19, 2012, from: <http://www.retrokat.com>

Abstract

“Little Songs of Long Ago: A Concoction of New and Old Verse” offers commentary on reproductive rights, most notably, on abortion. I recognize this to be a narrow focus which leaves many reproductive rights issues unexplored. I welcome anyone’s effort to expand this form. My work as an activist and as a student is informed by Marxist theory. I have included a resource page following this submission to serve those interested in Socialism and Marxist analysis. On the issue of abortion: Socialists argue that access to free abortion on demand is a prerequisite for women’s equality...

A woman’s right to choose has become front and center once again as this 2012 election cycle grinds its way through campaign rhetoric and spectacle.

President Obama’s election in 2008 was countered in 2010 when congressional elections swung in the opposite direction, ending the comfortable majority democrats had in both the house and senate. Due in part, though not entirely, to this backlash in representation, the United States has seen an upsurge in anti-choice legislation. It is no exaggeration to state that in the last two years over 1,000 bills have been introduced at the state level which would limit the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision (Feminist Majority Foundation, 2012). Hundreds of these bills have been passed, collectively called “The War on Women” by many on the left. This war on women is not limited to abortion access but also attacks birth control and access to insurance that would provide these health care needs. It is clear from the trajectory of these bills that women are not considered autonomous adults with the capacity to make reproductive choices for themselves or their families.

So if women are not adults with the ability to think and act in a way which reflects their belief system and needs, what are they? Perhaps “ward of the state” or “child” more accurately describes the position of women regarding reproduction and government intervention. An

analogy of woman as child may be developed further by analysis of the pre-pubescent bodies which trend in and out of popularity. The image is easily conjured of a hairless youth, nary a wrinkle or pucker to denote aging or experience as with childbirth or disability.

The mission of “Little Songs of Long Ago: A Concoction of New and Old Verse” is to simply begin work within this analogy by co-opting traditional children’s nursery rhymes for satirical purpose. Nursery rhymes are useful tools for developing reading skills in young children due to their sing-song nature and repetitive sounds. They may also serve to teach children about societal morals. Thus, they are at once innocent and indoctrinating. I have chosen this form in an attempt to exaggerate the juvenile status given to women and the ability to make their own reproductive choices.

References

Feminist Majority Foundation. (2012). Her votes: Top ten historic advances for women now at risk. Retrieved from <http://feminist.org/HERvotes/index.htm>

Further Reading

Thanksabortion.com

Plannedparenthoodaction.org

Marxists.org (a phenomenal archive of Marxist thinkers)

Internationalsocialist.org

Isreview.org

Wearemany.org

Socialistworker.org

Additionally I recommend:

Frederick Engels's *Origins of the Family*, 1884 (found at Marxists.org)

Alexandra Kollontai's *The Social Basis of the Women's Question*, 1909 (found at Marxists.org)

Christine Delphy's *For a Materialist Feminism*, 1975

Martha Gimenez's *The Oppression of Women: A Structuralist Marxist View*, 1978

Annette Kuhn and Ann Marie Wolpe's *Feminism and Materialism*, 1978

Rosalind Petchesky's *Morality and Personhood: A Feminist Perspective*, 1984

Katha Pollitt's *Fetal Rights: A New Assault on Feminism*, 1990

Sharon Smith's *Women and Socialism*, 2005

Transnational Discourses on Gender Variance

JC Acosta

Gender could be thought of as one of the easiest things in the world to do. Most people do gender everyday without stopping to think about it. At the same time, talking about gender is one of the hardest things for people to do. While gender is preformed in a public way, thinking about gender takes people into a private space. It is in this duality that gender is able to have a fluid and multilayered place in a person's identity. Gender becomes in a way the public consciousness and performance of meanings assigned to one or more gendered categories (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender presentation is the individual person's response and reaction to the larger gender ideology which informs everyone in society about which behaviors, dress, and attitudes fit into one of the gender categories, almost always corresponding to a biological sex (Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1994).

Most people have congruence between their sex, gender presentation, and their internal sense of gender identity. Most recently the category of cisgender or "gender normals" has been created to describe these individuals as juxtaposed with transgender, which describes any individual who does not identify in some way with the accepted or hegemonic gender ideology (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). In many ways transgender has become a catch-all term comprising a diverse group of individuals, many of whom reject the transgender label, viewing it as part of the same system they view as oppressive. But the "trans" identity firmly remains a space claimed by people outside of the hegemonic gender prescriptions however they define them.

As individuals negotiate these larger categories of identity in society, it is difficult to avoid the influence the media plays in prescribing gender roles. Modern mass media occupies a position where the messages millions receive are whichever images the network executives choose to portray. Early in the history of mass media, people discovered that media could be used as a tool to communicate values. At its worst, the mass media has been a vehicle for propaganda. Many of the formal mechanisms that promote propaganda have been dismantled, but the informal structures influencing social consciousness continue to inform the public. This isn't to say that movie studio executives are dictating exactly how people should behave; however, they are through TV, cinema, and advertisements, creating symbols and role models for each person to identify with, which sets a standard or expectation for behavior. When a system of surveillance and control causes people to act in certain ways, it is called panopticism (Foucault, 1977). For trans identified people, this comes as a balancing act between the normalized behaviors of cisgendered people and the constructed images of trans identities.

Almost everyone portrayed in TV shows or in movies is a cisgender person. Where this becomes problematic is when individuals who do not identify with the cisgendered space of identity are left out. This is the process of symbolic annihilation because as the media creates a picture of society, the people who are not in line with that picture lose their place in the social construction of society (Giovanelli & Ostertag, 2009). Power becomes vitally important in the social construction of society as those with it have the ability to attach value to difference (Johnson, 2006). Marginalized

groups like transgender people lose voice or their voices become distortions through the dominant group's lens.

What portrayals do appear fall into harmful tropes which reinforce stereotypes about transgender folks. Many tropes aimed at gender nonconformity play to misconceptions of transgender women but as more trans men have become visible, the messages have changed to reflect the same sentiments on to them as well. Julia Serano (2007) discusses two of these tropes in her book, *Whipping Girl*. The first is the "pathetic," an individual who is attempting to challenge the notions of gender presentation but fails in an obvious way. The very muscular "manly" man in a pink tutu exemplifies this trope. Where there would be nothing wrong with that person wearing anything he or she wanted, what this image creates is the idea that gender is fixed and cannot be challenged. On first glance the onlooker knows that the character is most decisively masculine. The pink tutu is the invocation of a strikingly feminine object. This translates to any person who the observer can tell embodies a sexed body somehow not matching his or her appearance or behavior. Within the gender system in America, men have an embodied power that women do not (Bornstein, 1998; Johnson, 2006). The trope of the pathetic takes power away from the man by putting the feminine identified object or behavior triggering the entrenched notion of powerless women. Their juxtaposition is intentional to reinforce that men are men and should conduct themselves as men; any violation of that norm is absurd.

The few individuals able to escape the pathetic trope many times fall into the other trope discussed in Serano's (2007) book, the "deceiver." Where the pathetic had no power, the deceiver is consciously using his or her power in order to lure and corrupt

hapless normal people, mainly heterosexual men, who would be converted to homosexuality. Deceivers represent an embodiment of the dangerous nature of any challenge to the gender system. They are almost always men masquerading as women for some less than respectable purpose. In the 1993 comedy *Mrs. Doubtfire*, for example, a man assumes the identity of an elderly English woman to circumvent a custody battle with his ex-wife. As this and other examples of the deceiver trope play out in cinema, characters go through a process on screen to conceal their sex from the other characters for any number of reasons. Films *Some Like It Hot* (1958), *Work it* (2011), and *Yentl* (1983) all exemplify this deceiver trope. Portrayals inevitably lead to comedic scenes where characters must juggle situations and maintain their disguise. Within this juggle, the result is always the same: someone, usually a man, discovers the character's "true identity" and exposes this to the community. Afterward, they must remain in their "true" sex to face their just punishment. What few examples of non comedic deceivers exist are focused on people who choose to identify as trans or gender nonconforming.

Unfortunately, these are usually based on true stories where someone is killed, usually the trans individual, such as *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), *The Crying Game* (1992) and *A Soldier's Girl* (2003), which all depict tragic outcomes as a result of male to female or female to male gender transgressions.

Using Serano's (2007) work, both the deceiver and the pathetic limit what is known about the character's internal sense of self. In an evolving world, the media is slowly beginning to address increasing numbers of trans identified people. Here, the media response has been to create tropes for them that focus on the internal sense of gender identity. In this new media climate, the old tropes still continue to be reproduced

along side new ones. For example, the sociopath/psychopath is an individual who has some fundamental flaw that creates the need to act in a gender non conforming way. This character behaves in ways designed to suggest that only a psychological illness would create the desire to want to occupy a trans space. Most visible in this category is the character Buffalo Bill from *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), who desires to become a woman by murdering women and wearing their skin. When Buffalo Bill “does” his gender, he becomes less of a person. Butler (2004) comments on everyday interactions involving gender where the attitudes and norms that inform the construction of Buffalo Bill as a representative figure of trans people causes an extension to his trans character that both repulses and projects onto trans people as a whole. This character is designed in such a disturbing way that nothing about Bill is redeeming. Although the film doesn’t suggest that all trans people are deranged killers, the trans aspect of his identity is intertwined with his dangerous mental condition.

As juxtaposition to the older messages about trans folk is the new space of reality TV and the docudrama. In these more recent spaces, studios have set out to capture the “real” story of this fringe group of people. At the same time that these programs are marketed as documentaries from the perspective to of trans people, the capitalist realities of the entertainment industry remain the underlying factor driving what is depicted and what is left out. As such, the messages that would be the accurate representation of the trans experience have a sensational component and a strong reinforcement of gender ideologies. Trans women are universally shown in dresses, applying makeup, or engaging in some behavior that communicates that they are feminine women. What does appear on screen that might suggest otherwise is the medical procedures that reaffirm a distinct

barrier between men and women. Taken from earlier discourses on sexuality, anyone who wishes to transgress social barriers can be associated with a medical “fix,” but problematically, the docudrama pathologizes the trans identity as a medical problem with a cure (Foucault, 1978).

In the MTV series *True Life*, an episode, “I’m Changing My Sex” (2009), focused on trans youth, attempting to document both a trans woman and a trans man’s stories. Underneath the camera’s following the two and doing spot interviews with their friends or families is the missing piece of gender nonconformity. Both of the young people fit into the gender spaces assigned to the sex they are becoming. Although problematizing any individual’s identity or choices is completely unfair, when these examples come to represent the only portrayals of trans narratives, they transform into a mechanism of oppression. The social construction of trans spaces uses media-influenced ideas as its foundation, leaving any deviation from that construct as extensions of the other media tropes. In this sense, one is allowed to be trans identified so long as it fits into the gender system. If not, then they must be a pathetic, a deceiver, or a sociopath.

Although this discussion paints a rather bleak picture for positive representations of trans folks in the mass media, there are healthy depictions of trans identities in foreign films and TV, which are slowly making their way into the American consciousness. *Ma Vie en Rose* (1997), a French language film, directly addressed a complex perspective on gender nonconformity with a trans identified child named Ludovic. Ludovic’s story stands apart from other more home grown attempts at positive trans portrayals as it depicts the issues encountered during the transition process of acceptance. Most importantly, the producers of the film intend for the audience to identify with Ludovic as

another child growing into a complicated world. The film challenges the gender system, but in a way that provokes the audience to focus on the human dignity within Ludovic.

Another French language film, *Tomboy* (2011), begs the audience to consider the tomboy identity as a socially constructed space with rules regardless of the feelings of the young woman claiming that identity. Where contemporary notions of acceptable gender presentation for females give a wider range than that for males, the gender system only allows for a temporary freedom for young girls to be tomboys. Inherent in this space is the need to clearly mark that individual as female but in the tomboy space as well as the temporary nature of the space. Young women are expected to grow out of the tomboy identity when the people around them, usually family, deem tomboy rejection necessary as part of girl peer bonding. The film inspires a discourse on that construction by conveying a young person in the tomboy space as a multidimensional human being. The tomboy identity doesn't define them but remains integral to their sense of self.

Both *Ma Vie en Rose* (1997) and *Tomboy* (2011) question notions of the social construction of gender with a perspective in gender nonconformity and performance as an extension of self. This becomes an important distinction within transgender discourses as they critique the gender system allowing for spaces of identity in a larger spectrum (Bornstein 1998, Butler 2004). Media narratives incorporating the formalized structures of "transition," such as the docu-drama, *South Park's* episode 901, "Mr. Garrison's Fancy New Vagina" (2005), and *Family Guy's* episode 818, "Quagmire's Dad" (2010), trivialize identity while making transition from one gender to another to be a quick and frivolous process. A Japanese TV show challenges these messages by incorporating the social and medical aspects of transition into the main plot of the show, *Hourou Musuko*

“Wandering Son” (2011), which follows the difficult journey of Nitori Shuichi, a young trans woman undergoing the initial stages of transition and negotiating this transgender identity while in middle school. Although a fictional account, this ties in many of the realities facing “trans” identified young people: members of his family disapprove, his school adheres to rigid gender scripts, and he is negotiating his desires for a relationship with a classmate, all while learning more about his identity within society. While this is a fictionalized account, the attention to a holistic experience of trans identity communicates a larger message about the multidimensional nature of transition and of any individual on the whole.

The constructions of society dictated by the mass media cannot be categorized as wholly problematic, but the representation of groups comes through the filter of norms and values media packages for consumption. Transgender people are multidimensional and deserve to have a constructed narrative that reflects their inherent humanity. As the current gender order becomes more entrenched in the mass media, the identities of trans identified people will be distanced further from the norm. However, some smaller transnational discourses are appearing and, should they reach American viewers, have the potential to open up a critical dialogue on the values espoused in modern mass media. The scholarship on these issues, especially Judith Butler (1997), challenges the public to reexamine the construction of gender and realize that real people live in a world of fluidity where identity is truly what one makes of it.

References

- Aoki, E. (Director). (2011). *Wandering son [Hourou Musuko]* [TV anime series]. Tokyo: Anime International Company.
- Berliner, A. (Director), Scotta, C. & Delume, D. (Producers). (1997). *Ma vie en rose* [Motion picture]. Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video.
- Bornstein, K. (1998). *My gender workbook: How to become a real man, a real woman, the real you, or something else entirely*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Columbus, C. (Director). (1993). *Mrs. Doubtfire* [Motion picture]. Beverly Hills, California: FoxVideo.
- Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *Silence of the lambs* [Motion picture]. New York: Orion Home Video.
- Forhan, B. (Producer). (2009). I'm changing my gender. In *True Life* (episode 21) [Television series]. New York: MTV.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality* (Vol. 1). New York: Pantheon.
- Giovanelli, D. & Ostertag, S. (2009). Controlling the body: Media representations, body size and self-discipline. In E. Rothblum & S. Solovay (Eds.), *The fat studies reader* (pp. 289-298). New York: NYU Press.
- Johnson, A. G. (2006). *Privilege, power, and difference*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

- Jordan, N. (Director & Writer). (1992). *The crying game* [Motion picture]. Van Nuys, CA: LIVE Home Video.
- Kaplan, C. (Producer) & Peirce, K. (Director). (1999). *Boys don't cry* [Motion picture]. Beverly Hills, CA: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment.
- Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Parker, T. (Producer). (2005). Mr. Garrison's fancy new vagina. In *South Park* (Season 9, episode 1) [Television series]. Hollywood, CA: Paramount.
- Pierson, F. (Director) & Nyswaner, R. (Writer). (2003). *A soldier's girl* [Motion picture]. United States: Showtime Entertainment.
- Reich, A. & Cohen, T. (Producers). (2011). *Work it* [Television series]. CA: ABC.
- Schilt, K. & Westbrook, L. (2009, August). Doing gender, doing heteronormativity: 'Gender normals,' transgender people, and the social maintenance of heterosexuality. *Gender & Society*, 23, 440-464.
- Sciamma, C. (Director). (2011). *Tomboy* [Motion picture]. New Almaden, CA: Wolfe Video.
- Serano, J. (2007). *Whipping girl: A transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity*. Berkeley: Seal Press.
- Smith, D. (Producer). (2010). Quagmire's dad. In *Family guy* (season 8, episode 18) [Television series]. Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.
- Streisand, B. (Director). (1983). *Yentl* [Motion picture]. Beverly Hills, CA: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.
- West, C. & Zimmerman, D. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & Society*, 1, 125-151.

Wilder, B. (Producer & Director). (1959). *Some like it hot* [Motion picture]. Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment.

The Transient Lover

marginally prolific and probably mediocre musings

Friday, April 27, 2012

Derrida, Difference, and Intelligence(s): Accessible Theory and Its Necessity for Feminism

Jacques Derrida's (1978) work is central to understanding difference as feminists conceptualize it. As feminists, we need to not only to understand, but also to utilize this difference in order to create inclusive spaces and legislation. There is a dialectical relationship (Collins, 1990) between feminism and patriarchy, which Derrida (1978) helps us to understand (see fig. 1). I chose to illustrate this by satire on my personal blog last fall:

The Hazards of Post-Structuralism*

I was going to write about the hazards of post-structuralism tonight. But first, let me just start off by saying that I *love* theorizing. Explicating in detail abstract concepts in all of their conjectural glory grasps my attention like little else. That being said, I hate analyzing. I find the critical examination of pre-established fact or opinion to be quite boring, irksome at best, and seriously annoying at worst. This is probably because I feel that I am a very creative individual, who does not like being told what or how to think about something. Heck, I don't even know where I get half the stuff I come up with sometimes. (Just kidding! Usually I read things in peer reviewed anthologies, reputable blogs, or on [Snopes.com](#), and then formulate opinions and ideas based on what I've read. I know it sounds pretty visionary, but what can I say? When you've been in school as long as I have, you tend to develop this sort of happy talent for synthesizing what you've learned in fabulously magical ways.)

Anyway, I am in full cognizance of the fact that I just set up a structure in which theory and analysis are at opposite ends of a binary system. As Jacques Derrida, god among post-structuralists that he was, so kindly attempted to perform for the rest of us, this structure is flawed in that it is, in fact, a structure. Seeing as how theory and analysis typically tend to be in diametric opposition only in a small subset of the Humanities, I am aware that my deconstruction of them will only further add to any misconceptions that people may have about me being pretentious and having aspirations to academia. It's okay, though, I think I've self-actualized that statement. Almost. (Probably because I don't necessarily disagree with about 75% of it.)

Since my theory/analysis structure aims for fixity but is doomed to fall short anyway because That Is What Binary Systems Tend To Do With Alarming Regularity, I will now deconstruct what I call the Analysis-Theory Dichotomy. I'll illustrate this phenomenon in a linear fashion:



Basically, because analysis is boring and theory is awesome (bearing in mind that this structure was purposefully developed with the assumption that this is a societal norm rather than a personal opinion), and because nothing can be more boring than analysis or more awesome than theory, analysis and theory exist both as a part of this Analysis-Theory Dichotomy and independently of it. Which demonstrates the internal contradictions of this "fixed" structure, and how its fixity is actually an impossible goal. Anyway, I really don't expect anyone to really comprehend or care about my obviously prolific musings today. Which leads me back to my original topic: the hazards of post-structuralism.

Post-structuralist deconstruction, though fascinating, can make one out to appear terribly grandiloquent, especially when applied to topics already deemed pretentious such as *theory* and *analysis*. Essentially, it has the potential to make you out to appear as a giant jerk.

And there it is. Hm. Maybe I'm not cut out for deconstruction. I think I really do make a much better satirist than analyst or theorist.

I realize that this blog post is a study in my own pretension. One might say that this blog post was my own “theory performativity” (Butler, 2004, 1990). I refer to this as such because while I did initially set out to write a satire, the ultimate result was a satiric piece drenched in so much theory that the theory completely obfuscates the original satire (Butler, 1999).

A Study in Why We Need Derrida:

Like most spaces, queer spaces are also gendered, classed, and racialized. In such spaces, exclusivity can become acceptable, normalized, and realized, and spaces that have such distinctions become re-inscribed with race-based difference (Tucker, 2009). This occurred in Cape Town, South Africa, a purportedly new, liberal queer space in the post-apartheid society, where such “alleged liberalism” actually helped justify racism (Tucker, 2009).

This is resultant of creating a distinction between the “colored queer men” and the “white queer patriarchs,” and the acknowledgment of this difference, actually gave *more* power to the “white queer patriarchs.” (Tucker, 2009). The way the distinction between the “white queer patriarchs and the “colored queer men” gave more power to the “white queer patriarchs” is a sort of fusion between Difference A and Difference B as outlined in “Derrida and Feminism: A Remembrance” (Grosz, 2005 (see fig. 2)). This is because the methodology for achieving the ultimate goal is informed by Difference B, but the theoretical framework for the methodology is informed by Difference A.

I have demonstrated this by substituting the words “white queer patriarch” for “theory” and “colored queer men” for “analysis” from the blog post above (Scrivani, 2011) in the example that follows.

Trigger warning - Substitutions create racism:

I was going to write about the hazards of post-structuralism tonight. But first, let me just start off by saying that I *love* **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS**. The fact that they make more money, have a sense of entitlement, and do not face racial discrimination is really cool. That being said, I hate **COLORED QUEER MEN**. I find the fact that they are discriminated against because of their skin tone totally their fault, genetically based, and completely valid. This is probably because I feel that I am a person who is allowed to feel these things, being white myself, and one who does not like being told what or how to think about something. Heck, I don't even know where I get half the stuff I come up with sometimes. (Just kidding! Usually I read things in peer reviewed anthologies, reputable blogs, or on Snopes.com, and then formulate opinions and ideas based on what I've read. I know it sounds pretty visionary, but what can I say? When you've been in school as long as I have, you tend to develop this sort of happy talent for synthesizing what you've learned in fabulously magical ways.)

Anyway, I am in full cognizance of the fact that I just set up a structure in which **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** and **COLORED QUEER MEN** are at opposite ends of a binary system. As Jacques Derrida, god among post-structuralists that he was, so kindly attempted to perform for the rest of us, this structure is flawed in that it is, in fact, a structure. Seeing as how **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** and **COLORED QUEER MEN** typically tend to be in diametric opposition only in a small area of the World, I am aware that my deconstruction of this binary will only further add to any misconceptions that people may have about me as being pretentious and having racist tendencies. Since my **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCH / COLORED QUEER MEN** structure aims for fixity but is doomed to fall short anyway because That Is What Binary Systems Tend To Do With Alarming Regularity, I will now deconstruct what I call the **COLORED QUEER MEN-WHITE QUEER PATRIARCH** Dichotomy. I'll illustrate this phenomenon in a linear fashion:



Basically, because **COLORED QUEER MEN** are boring and **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** are awesome (bearing in mind that this structure was purposefully developed with the assumption that this is a societal norm rather than a personal opinion), and because nothing can be more boring than **COLORED QUEER MEN** or more awesome than **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS**, **COLORED QUEER MEN** and **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** exist both as a part of this **COLORED QUEER MAN-WHITE QUEER PATRIARCH** Dichotomy and independently of it. Which demonstrates the internal contradictions of this “fixed” structure, and how its fixity is actually an impossible goal. Anyway, I really don't expect anyone to really comprehend or care about my obviously prolific musings today. Which leads me back to my original topic: the hazards of post-structuralism. Binary deconstruction can make one out to appear terribly asinine, especially when applied to topics that are racist such as **WHITE QUEER PATRIARCHS** and **COLORED QUEER MEN**. Essentially, it has the potential to make you out to appear as a giant jerk.

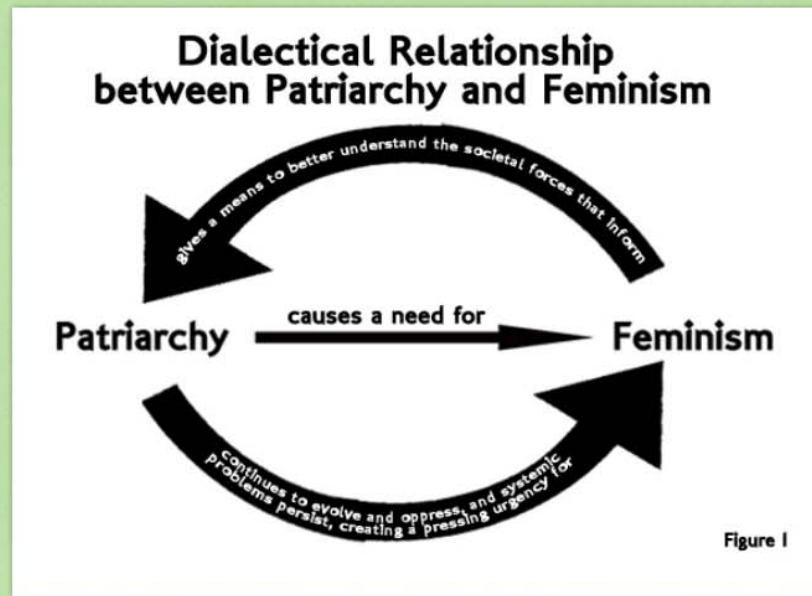
And there it is. Hm. Maybe I am cut out for deconstruction. I think I really do make a much better theorist than racist.

This was merely an exercise to demonstrate my point and drive Derrida's (1978) home.

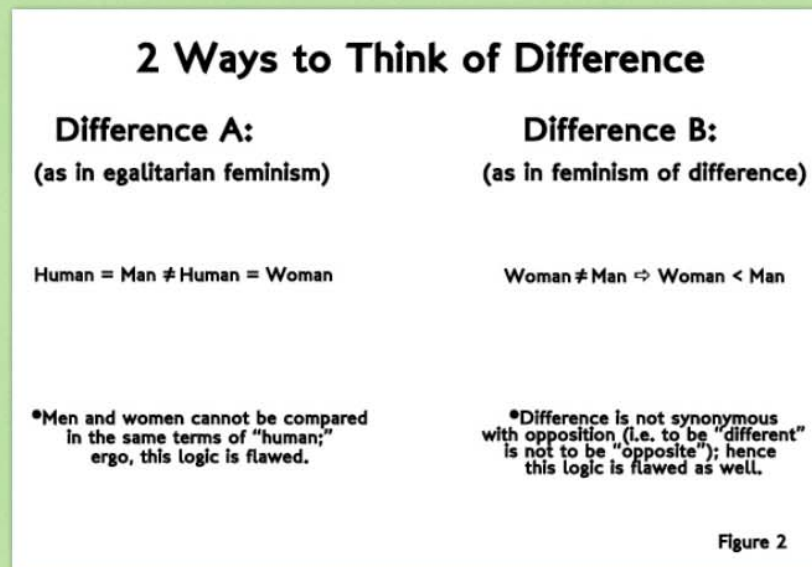
Bearing in mind that the binary structure devised an inherently racist commentary when I substituted “colored queer men” and “white queer patriarchs” for “analysis” and “theory” respectively, Derrida's (1978) difference can be used to help us understand how the oppression works within this post-apartheid society, and help us to devise methods to rectify these injustices. This permeates the breadth of language's power in true Foucauldian (1990) fashion.

I understand that not everyone absorbs theory through written word, and that there are different ways to learn. There are different types of intelligence as well (Gardner, 2011.) According to Howard Gardner, there are nine different types of intelligences, and people who possess these different types of intelligence learn in different ways (Gardner, 2011). Those who are not inclined to verbal-linguistic intelligence often criticize theory as inaccessible to the masses, but it does not need to be so. For individuals who may be more visually inclined, I offer two diagrams that I have designed in Photoshop.

The first explains how patriarchy and feminism are interrelated, drawing on the dialectical relationship between oppression and activism outlined in "Toward a Politics of Empowerment" (Collins, 2000):



The second outlines the two ways feminists thought of difference prior to *Writing and Difference* (Derrida, 1978), according to Elizabeth Grosz in "Derrida and Feminism: A Remembrance" (Grosz, 2005):



As a feminist first, theorist second, it is of utmost importance to me that our theoretical concepts are accessible to the greatest amount of people. If not, how can we prevent exclusivity in our already marginalized spaces? We need to make sure that everyone is able to understand and synthesize our ideas, or they will not do any of us any good.

*edited from original blog post: <http://eminisms.blogspot.com/2011/09/hazards-of-post-structuralism.html>

References

- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). Toward a politics of empowerment. In *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed., pp. 273-97). New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (1978). Structure, sign and play in the discourse of the human sciences. In *Writing and difference* (A. Bass, Trans., pp. 279-93). London: Routledge-Taylor.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The History of sexuality: An introduction (Vol. 1)*. New York: Random House.
- Gardner, H. (2011). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
- Grosz, E. (2005). Derrida and feminism: A remembrance. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 16(3), 88-94.
- Srivani, E. (2011, September 23). The hazards of post-structuralism [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://eminisms.blogspot.com/2011/09/hazards-of-post-structuralism.html>
- Tucker, A. (2009). Framing exclusion in Cape Town's gay village: The discursive and material perpetration of inequitable queer subjects. *Area*, 41(2), 186-197. doi:10.1111/j.1475-4762.2008.00852.x

Posted by Em Scrivani at 3:13 PM

GLBTQ Bullying: Short Story and Policy Statement

Martin Green

My final Women's and Gender Studies project is a culmination of some of my various activisms as well as my passions. I am in my senior year, second semester with plans to graduate, study abroad, and then go to graduate school for Counseling Education. I am an active president of Sexual Orientations United for Liberation (SOUL) and treasurer of the Women's and Gender Studies Organization (WGSO). Through my activism, I have utilized the resources from both organizations to bring light to the issues of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) bullying in schools and through The College at Brockport. This contribution is a montage of short fiction and a self created policy statement where feminist theory and activism apply.

Theorists that have helped inform this work include Judith Butler (1997), Michel Foucault (1980), and Rubin, Hollibaugh & English (1982). These thinkers provide a framework in the implementation of both the short story and policy statement. For example, according to Butler (1997) gender is fluid and defined as a performative work in which one is undone (pp. 496-504). Additionally, inscriptions of gender and sexuality on the body are problematic and oppressive to gay men in that they are seen as more feminine and acting outside of normal gender roles assigned to binary genders. Secondly, Foucault's (1980) piece on the power of language and sexuality helps define some of my work in that he writes about oppression on sexuality through the use of language and power. Lastly, Rubin et al define sexuality upon a hierarchical pyramid where heterosexual and married procreative sex is seen as the least taboo pleasure. All of these works relate to supposed standards of sexuality in western culture, specifically in the United States where sexuality is seen as taboo by the church, but also within social constructions that constrict deviations from the norm.

I wrote the short story below to create a picture of a bullying event, in particular, with someone who identifies as a gay man. This story is both personal and informational. This story will shine light on a discrimination issue that I passionately advocate against. I hope the story brings hope to anyone facing discrimination in the form of bullying.

Heard Silence: A Short Story

He remembered the days when the bullying first occurred during his late middle school years up until now while he sits in his advanced science class. He thought that sitting with the smarter kids in science class would help alleviate some of the hatred and slander from fellow classmates. There was still the occasional slur of “fag” or “sissy” from the kids in the room but he still managed to stay somewhat strong. Each slur, even though minor, was like a small paper cut in his skin, but he thought it’s better than the few slaps to his head or spit balls from the kids in the other non-advanced classes.

Gym was always difficult. Teachers told him that he should always participate. That’s the only way to get a decent grade in the class. *Constant participation*. Gym teachers never really understood Justin’s decision not to play in many of the games. At first, Justin thought he just wasn’t good enough to play. Some of the other kids had decent skills, not too great. Maybe he could catch up to them. It seemed easy but it wasn’t. His mannerisms were just different, and anytime he would throw a basketball through a hoop it was comparable to the way some of the girls in the class had played. There were inscriptions of sexuality on his body. He was marked by the other kids in his class as gay even without openly expressing himself, just by his performance and perceived gender expression.

He wanted to be better, more masculine, maybe then his sexual orientation wouldn’t be so obvious to the others in the classroom. Maybe then his orientation wouldn’t be something to

be harassed about. He never thought it was something he wanted to change overnight, but he wanted to be normal. He wanted to not be looked at as taboo as he never personally felt that way, even though most of his life had to be lived in secret. Who said that sex had to be for procreative purposes only, when most people used it for pleasure?

There were times when Justin would complain to the Principal and multiple teachers about his harassment. The occasional answer would be, “Boys will be boys...” Sure thing: “Boys will be boys.” That was a complete copout from actually doing anything on the teacher’s part. Boys aren’t inclined to act upon homophobic attitudes in order to make one feel better nor is it plausible to call it human nature to ridicule and harass an oppressed sexuality.

Sex isn’t something biological anymore, nor shall the essentialist perspective be taken into consideration to even construct sexuality. Teachers and principals had already diagnosed Justin within the social exonerations of homosexuality. Justin was seen as taboo even to the principals. If only he could construct their views into something that was a little less daunting and a little more inclusive. If only people could understand that his and others sexualities as well are written under social inscriptions that once told people to only behave sexually under procreative notions. Not all the heterosexuals in the school had sex to get pregnant. That in itself was kind of taboo at his school and he knew that most of his friends, and past friends, behaved sexually to gain pleasure.

His parents, who once tried to disown him, came to the school with multiple complaints about the appearance of their son. Justin had come home from school many times with bruises and scrapes. He always wore his emotions on his face and usually came home diminished, worn out, and exhausted. After hearing stories on the news of recent teen suicides, Justin’s parents knew they had to do something. They wanted to help Justin build personal empowerment, but

they soon wrote their complaints to the school itself in letter form. It was a huge step for the parents to do something because they had not come to terms with their son's sexuality until recently. He hadn't come out to them until after a year of identity reconciliation. The school was apprehensive of the letter at first, thinking that the bullying was not a problem. The principal thought teen suicides could never happen at the school; the students were just overreacting.

Justin's parents helped him overcome some of the anxiety by allowing him some sense of agency within his high school. Issues of teen suicides were discussed in his household. Even though the parents were not completely supportive of his sexuality, they loved their son and were willing to save his life.

The letter didn't really do as much as planned, however it happened that some students revolted and found sanctuary among other students that were part of the same community and grew with acceptance. Justin confided in his high school chorus teacher, asking him to sponsor a group for people of various sexualities and gender identities. The high school's first Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) group soon provided LGBT students a place to go to voice their concerns and find sanctuary. The group began with five members, students who accepted different genders and sexual identities. It first became a place of community, then grew into activism as students fundraised in support of trips to conferences to learn safer school tactics and LGBT leadership. These leadership activities were similar to those of a safe school's summit.

Policy Statement

The following policy statement demonstrates there is a need to implement change and create a safe atmosphere for students everywhere. Homophobic bullying is a problem that can cause post-traumatic stress disorder, trauma to a student in general, and internalized homophobia

wherein an LGBT community member has negative perceptions of the self (Rivers, 2004). In addition, the policy statement seeks to empower youths through the implementation of a gay-straight alliance (GSA) on high school grounds. GSAs can promote diversity and acceptance across communities, bringing together minority cultures (Craig, Tucker & Wagner, 2008). Although very general, this statement can work in almost any institution that lacks inclusion within LGBT communities.

To End the Bullying Epidemic

To Whom It May Concern:

After looking through your school's policy regarding bullying, we have noticed a few flaws which are problematic to the safety of your students. Additionally, we have noticed discrimination based on sexual orientation throughout your school's academic structure.

First, it is important that your school have an open advisor willing to help students start a GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) at your school. We feel that GSAs help bring together members of the GLBT community as they give all students a space with a sense of belonging. A GSA can help bring awareness to the issues faced by the LGBT community and increase awareness among heterosexual allies and others. GSAs increase diversity and bring people together. We feel that more inclusive policies in the school would also help it build a more inclusive environment to diverse people.

Secondly, it is important to look at your school's policy surrounding bullying and LGBT bullying more specifically. Any bullying set on students under the premise that a student might be different than others is morally wrong. Everyone at this school deserves a safe place where one doesn't have to worry about emotional, verbal, and physical violence. We've noticed that your school has taken many strides to advocate against drug use, obscenities, child abuse, and many other problems kids are faced with. Why should bullying be any different?

We are taking a stand to act against discrimination and violence in schools. We hope to advocate for equal opportunities for all students to get an education and experience school positively. If your school does not make an anti-bullying policy, you are putting the students at risk for drug abuse, violence, discrimination, stress, academic failure, and even suicide.

Signed,

Conclusion

The short story, policy statement, and personal analysis capture the culmination of my work in Women and Gender Studies, SOUL, and WGSO. Additionally, the theories I turned to when writing both the policy statement and the short story above have aided the creation of my activism and advocacy against LGBT bullying. These theories represent my views on sex and gender as they play out in western culture where sex and gender are so rigidly criticized through narrow perspectives. These theories play out in concept and application as they resonate personally as well as globally. As I move forward to consider graduate studies in Counseling Education, I will continue to use these works to direct my studies and create an inclusive workplace. It is true that sexuality is socially constructed and constantly scrutinized. As Rubin et al state,

Sex is always political. But there are also historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overtly politicized. In such periods, the domain of erotic life is, in effect, renegotiated (p.50).

References

- Butler, J. (1990). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. In W. Kolmar & F. Bartkowski (Eds.), *Feminist theory: A reader* (2nd ed.), (pp. 496-504). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Craig, S. L., Tucker, E. W., & Wagner, E. F. (2008). Empowering lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: Lessons learned from a safe schools summit. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, 20(3), 237-250.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality (Vol. 1): An introduction*. New York: Vintage.
- Rivers, I. (2004). Recollections of bullying at school and their long-term implications for lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. *Crisis*, 25(4), 169-175.
- Rubin, G., Hollibaugh, A., & English, D. (1982, Summer). Talking sex: A conversation on sexuality and feminism. *Feminist Review*, 11, 40-52.



Parenting from the Margins

Jessica Muller

Think Again!

The category of woman is often seen as monolithic in feminism. The nuclear family is seen as an enormous obstacle to women's liberation (Martin, 2011). According to many feminist viewpoints, motherhood is simply a duty forced upon women by patriarchal structures. Mothers are thought to lose all sense of identity and self. Feminism suggests that women reject marriage and the nuclear family model. Women would be better off refraining from having children. Women with children already should stop defending nuclear motherhood because "it is the nuclear family in which patriarchy reproduces itself" (Martin).

The idea of mothering (or parenting for the sake of being inclusive) from the margins is derived from the understanding that the experiences of women are not monolithic. For example, white women are mothers; white babies are seen as wanted. Child rearing as any other identity is seen as less than. Racial minorities fight to be seen as anything other than "irresponsible breeders" (Martin). Rarely does one encounter a positive reaction as a pregnant teenager, black woman, LGBT person, or poor person. People who identify with one or more of these identities must fight every day to be seen

as legitimate parents. Feminism should reconsider having a child in a marginal group and fighting this daily fight is a challenge to the patriarchy. Motherhood and parenting can be a source for activism and change both by challenging societal norms of who can successfully raise children, and by educating and empowering children to rethink current structures dictating family norms.

Who better than a feminist to raise a child? Children of feminists will be far less tolerant of the current hierarchy and social inequities. A parenting feminist is actively creating a better world each day.

While giving a presentation about the representation of motherhood and feminism, I asked a group of people to build a list of qualities that define a good mother, or parent.

Qualities That Make a Good Parent

Loving

Patient

Accepting

Supportive

Creative

Nurturing

Involved

Stable

Flexible

Committed

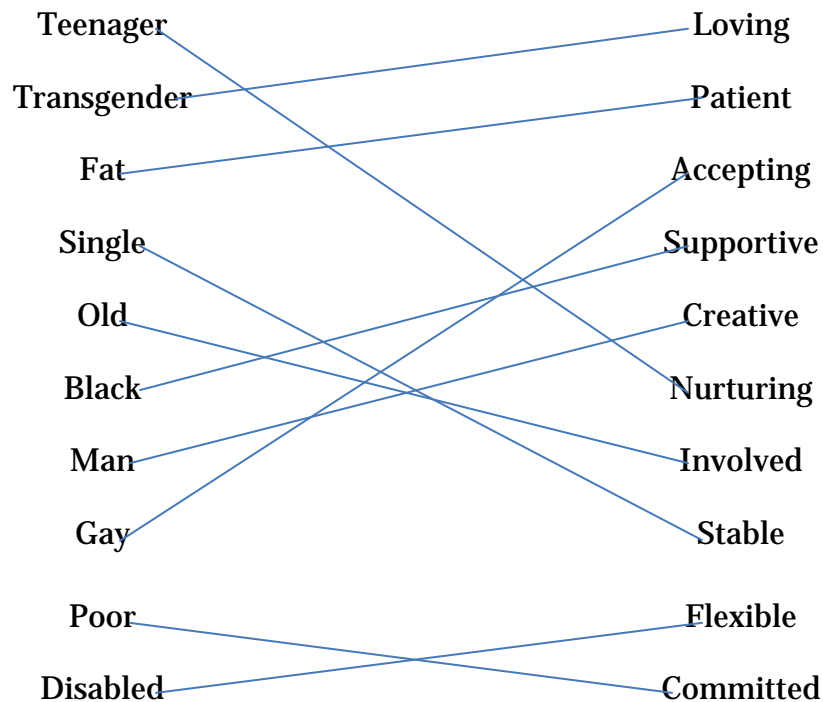
Then I *challenged* the group. Using a list of identifiers that commonly evoke discrimination from others, we made comparisons between the identifiers and the

qualities that were decided make a good parent. Is it possible to both possess an identity discriminated against or be a part of a group stereotyped as bad parents, and still be a good parent according to the parenting standards we created? Do the qualities that make a good parent have any barriers to minority identities? For instance, is there a cause specific relationship between being black and neglectful (the common stereotype) and is there anything preventing a black mother from being an involved parent? This exercise forced us to look past stereotypes and recognize that anyone can possess the qualities of a good parent. However, there are structural issues that make it more challenging for marginalized individuals to meet these parenting expectations. If a poor, racially oppressed mother must work three jobs to feed her children, does she have the freedom to be an involved parent? Working three jobs doesn't distract from her desire to be an involved parent, it simply prevents it.

Can a person possess both qualities?

Identity

Emotional Agency



People possess a variety of qualities. Our daily experiences tell us so. By encountering real people, or possibly possessing a marginalized identity ourselves, we can say that people break down stereotypes every day. The issue is, people in the identity list, and other groups not listed, face discrimination for having children based on the assumption that they will not be good parents. The diagram above shows that the

qualities deemed most important for parents to possess can be held by a diverse group of people. So what exactly is the problem with poor, young or disabled people parenting? What is at the root of the stigma?

I believe it is an issue of stability. Society views these disenfranchised groups as unable to provide stable families or as ill-equipped to parent without assistance.



Wait a minute! Back up! Has anyone ever done it alone?

What if all parents had sufficient **SUPPORT** and **COMMUNITY** available to them?

Would a young single parent continue to be constructed as devastating to society?

Is it possible to live in a world that truly provides the *freedom* to decide whether or not to parent? While feminists celebrate choice and the ability to follow unconventional paths to motherhood, feminists ignore the ideological binary of legitimate choice-making mothers and 'bad' choice-making mothers. Mothers who break the social narratives of timing are often viewed as 'bad' choice-makers. However, would these choices to parent against social norms continue to be viewed as bad with a stronger societal foundation of parental support in place?

What would it look like if all parents had access to...

- Safe Housing
- Food
- Healthcare
- Education



- Childcare
- Transportation
- Supportive work environment
- Emotional support system

These necessities are **NOT** handouts. Basic programs for childhood well-being would begin building a strong foundation of education, preventative health care, and nourishing food, causing children to have a greater chance of positively contributing to society as adults. By providing basic parenting resources as prevention, the cost of safety nets and crisis programs would be significantly reduced. The common example of welfare as a financial drain on society would decrease if more jobs with a living wage and supportive work environment existed. Single parents or households with two working adults could afford to remain employed if childcare were subsidized. The more adults in the workforce, the stronger the economy becomes for the entire country. How many more parents could provide *stability*, *attention*, *patience* and *creativity* when they're not worried about where to live next month or whether they can afford to purchase baby formula with their next paycheck?

Look Around You

We must **BUILD** and **SUSTAIN** communities. We must **THANK** the people around us that contribute and contribute to those around us. A community is similar to an eco-system; we must put back in what we take from it. There are no plants or animals that function on their own, only those that have a role within the system. Communities are an organism that requires effort, consistency, and flexibility. The outcome benefits every person that is a part of it.

I have thanked the people in *my* community. Without these individuals, I would not have an education, a safe place to live, child care, flexible employment or an emotional support system. Without these people, my children would not be growing into lovely, empathetic, well rounded people. Every day I work to give back to my community and build stability for others. By putting my efforts into my community, I know that my children will have a safe and productive environment to live in.

What Can YOU Do?

RECOGNIZE that good parents are found in many places and in diverse packages. Tell them they are doing a good job and you appreciate the hard work it takes to raise children into ethical people. These children are the leaders of the future, and it is important to teach them strong ethics and values. Pay attention to the way fruitful communities function. Realize your role in the give and take actions of your community. How do you contribute and what more could you be doing? What resources in your community do you use? Are there more resources that would benefit your community and how can you make these a reality?

RALLY for programs and initiatives that provide support and stability for families. Access to food, safe housing, health care and quality child care should not be a privilege but a human right. Providing everyone with an equal and strong foundation leads to a strong and stable community and economy for everyone. The well-being of children determines their future as adults and ultimately their future is **EVERYONE'S** future.

References

Martin, R. (2011, October 24). Once again white radical feminists miss the point in the mommyhood debates [Web log message]. Retrieved from http://www.womanist-musings.com/2011/10/once-again-white-radical-feminists-miss_24.html

Further Readings

Massino, J. (2012). Making the history of 1989: Women's reflections on motherhood and reproduction under socialism. Retrieved from:
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/items/show/560>

Solidarity. (2010). From abortion rights to reproductive justice: A socialist feminist agenda. Retrieved from <http://www.solidarity-us.org/pdfs/reproductivejustice.pdf>

Thompson, M. (2006). Third wave feminism and the politics of motherhood. *Genders*, (43), 1-40. Retrieved from http://www.genders.org/g43/g43_marythompson.html

Disciplining the Body: Excessive Exercise Disorder

Jessica Velez

The concept of the ideal body is everywhere. More often women are the target of this idea. Images of the ideal body for a woman are shoved in our faces every day by advertisements in magazines, movies, and commercials. How to achieve this perfect body is forced upon us by personal trainers, dieticians, plastic surgeons, friends, and family. The latest diet trend and the newest piece of exercise equipment become relevant information to our everyday lives because healthy is equated with being skinny. Feminist theorists such as Michel Foucault (1990) and Judith Butler (1997), as well as the author of *Perfect Girls Starving Daughters* Courtney E. Martin (2007), have considered the pressures that are put on women to have this “perfect” body. The consequences are significant.

The expectations of body perfection often manifest in eating disorders. In general, nearly 24 million people of all ages and genders suffer from an eating disorder in the United States at some point in their lives (ANAD, 2012). The most common eating disorders are anorexia and bulimia; however there is another eating disorder that often goes unrecognized. It is known as compulsive exercise (also referred to as exercise addiction, exercise dependency, or obligatory exercise). This disorder is defined by a person’s frame of mind around exercising. People with this disorder exercise not because they want to, but because they feel compelled to do so and often struggle with guilt and anxiety if they miss a workout. For these people their days are planned around their workouts and illness. Injury, outings with friends, or bad weather will not deter them from completing the workout. Often times, the person is trying to establish a sense of control in order to cope with other underlying issues such as depression. Self-esteem is based on performance, but the person will never be able to achieve enough. People who compulsively

exercise also usually suffer from some disordered form of eating (KidsHealth: Compulsive exercise, 2012). The amount of food and what kind of food they eat is determined by how long or hard they worked out. If they ate “too much,” they will work out harder and longer to compensate for the food consumption. This continuous exercise regimen can lead to several debilitating physical side effects such as bone loss, muscle loss, dehydration, heart strain, joint deterioration, and in some cases, amenorrhea, which is the loss of a girl’s menstrual period. Mental side effects include social isolation, depression, anxiety, other compulsions, and a negative image of self (KidsHealth).

As mentioned earlier, ideal body perfection is frequently aimed at women, and as such, excessive exercise disorder is most often seen among women. Men, however, can also be affected. For men, this is often defined as Body Dysmorphia Disorder (BDD) (Olivardia, 2000). The main difference between men and women in regards to compulsive exercising is that men often exercise to increase muscle tone whereas women want to lose weight or tone their body to be slimmer (Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2002). Also, men who engage in compulsive exercise are usually involved in sports that have weight restrictions or emphasis on being a certain weight. These sports include swimming, wrestling, gymnastics, body building, and running (Sundgot-Borgen, 2011). The attitude of athletes involved in these sports is not just limited to men. In Martin’s *Perfect Girls, Starving Daughters*, there is a chapter entitled “Past the Dedication is Disease: Athletic Obsession,” which discusses the mindset of a female athlete. Women are often compared to men in their athletic performance and are therefore pressured into extreme and unhealthy levels of commitment. Compared to men, women find it difficult not to think about their sport once done playing for the day. Women often feel they must prove themselves as dedicated athletes and continue to push themselves regardless of injuries or fatigue. This is

where dedication turns into disease, however the exercise compulsion and negative consequences often will go “unnoticed” until the season is over.

What is it about society that puts so much pressure on women to be thin that they are driven to exercise and eating disorders like this? Philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault (1990) offers one explanation stemming from the idea that when new political institutions such as the army, schools, hospitals, and prisons were introduced into society, the human body became a focus of discipline in order to be more efficient in employing the rules these societal institutions impose. Power and control over one’s body created disciplined, practiced bodies, which Foucault (1990) describes as “docile” bodies. Foucault’s (1990) theories fail to recognize the differences of power over men versus women. In an analysis of Foucault’s theory, Bartky (1990) looks at how dieting and exercise disciplines are different for men and women. Femininity in our society is seen as being slender, taking up less space, and being submissive. Men and women both exercise, but it is suspected that women are exercising for very different reasons where exercise becomes an act to adhere to socially constructed pressures of what is ideal and good for women’s bodies.

Butler (1997) describes how gender is a performance for our societal audience. Gender is a social construction that categorizes women as small, delicate, slender, and polite, while men are categorized as strong, loud, big, and powerful. Butler argues that women and men are therefore performing activities such as dieting and exercising in order to meet the expectations of socially constructed gender orders. Women obey these conditions without even realizing it because what they do realize is that they will be negatively judged if they do not fit this model. In order to comply with this “perfect” model, women will cause physical harm to their bodies through dieting and exercise to obtain the ideal beauty. My own story supports this conclusion.

Being: Excessive Exercise and the Reach for Perfection

When I was thirteen years old I received my first gym membership. I had suffered a personal trauma, but I was not ready to deal with it. Instead, I exercised. My workouts became more intense until they became the priority of my life. The first thing I thought about when I woke up was when I could exercise that day, and how long I would have to go so that I could eat what I wanted without feeling guilty. I refused to hang out with friends or family until my workouts had been completed. I began going to the gym two or three times a day, accumulating about three hours of exercise a day. Days of rest did not exist. My knees, ankles, shins, and hips were so worn down that it hurt to walk from my bed to the bathroom. On the outside I looked like a healthy, dedicated, and motivated athlete. On the inside I was exhausted, stressed, and depressed. Finally, my energy wore out and I got the help I needed. I now only exercise about four times a week and for a maximum of one hour. It is a hard issue to overcome, but once I did my life improved dramatically.

Below is a poem I began writing when I was around 16 or 17 years old and that I finished at the peak of my exercise disorder. It conveys the feelings and thoughts I had when obsessed with exercise.

Being

an athlete is my
excuse. Three hours of
working out is healthy?
But my body is

In

pain. Take a break?
I push harder. Burn
more calories. Commit to
the rules. Don't lose

Control

because it's everything. Can't
socialize with friends. Can't
sit still. Can't eat
"bad" food, until it

Feels
like my body will
collapse. No longer have
a choice. I want
to stop, but I'm

Powerless.

Women are often fighting to have power and control in their lives. Unfortunately, when women engage in unhealthy eating habits and exercise regimens, they are really giving the power back to the society that is telling them to be thinner. Gender is fluid and women do not have to be thin, quiet, or sweet in order to be women (Butler). The power and control that women have over their bodies is used in a different way than men, in that they are trying to make their bodies fit the feminine mold (Foucault). This is and will be a constant struggle for most women struggling to resist systems of power playing on the body; even so, addiction to exercise is possible to overcome. Like other eating disorders, counseling is strongly recommended as a first step to recovery. Working through underlying issues and gaining self-awareness is extremely beneficial for those suffering from eating disorders, including excessive exercise disorder (ANAD, 2012). It is extremely hard to tackle excessive exercise disorder alone so it is important to ask for help and have a good support system in place.

References

- Bartky, S.L. (1990). Foucault, femininity, and the modernization of patriarchal power. In S. Kim & C. R. McCann (Eds.), (2010). *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspective*. (2nd ed.)(pp. 401-407). New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1997). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In S. Kim & C. R. McCann (Eds.), (2010). *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspective*. (2nd ed.)(pp. 401-407). New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality (Vol. 1): An introduction*. London: Penguin.
- KidsHealth: Compulsive exercise. (2012). Retrieved from http://kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/problems/compulsive_exercise.html
- ANAD (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders). (2012). About eating disorders: Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>
- Martin, C.E. (2007). *Perfect girls, starving daughters: How the quest for perfection is harming young women*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Pope, H. G., Phillips, K. A., & Olivardia, R. (2002). *Adonis complex: How to identify, treat, and prevent body obsession in men and boys*. New York: Touchstone.
- Sundgot-Borgen, J. (2011, December 20). Disordered eating. Retrieved from the world sport website: <http://allworldsport.org/118-disordered-eating.html>

Silence Because of Fear

Sara Rolls

Wide eyed, the first hit, hits with shock.

The next couple secures the commitment

Or rather the fear of escape.

Denial, Dehumanized, Domestic Violence.

The need for control, undeserved consequences.

How to leave? How to find a voice again?

Screaming within thoughts but will never be loud enough.

Silence because of fear.

Mind and body held in two hands.

Mother, children, and family

All trapped under one roof.

Economic instability confines the love.

Define Love.

Bruises, cuts, Death?

Plan to buy running shoes

But how far can feet travel

When the body is shattered?

The body will be rebuilt with time.

Poet's Statement

I wrote this poem to express some of my own experiences with domestic violence. This poem not only voices my perspective, it encompasses the words of anonymous people affected by domestic violence in some way. Associated with my activist work in my women and gender studies senior seminar class, I hung posters with trigger words related to domestic violence in public bathrooms on campus, asking people to write what comes to mind as prompted by the trigger words. This rest room anonymous post/respond strategy helped to expose a diverse look at the widespread issue of domestic violence. Interestingly, the exercise revealed that some male responders felt less passionately about the conflicts surrounding domestic violence. Within a society that forces domestic violence to be solely a women's issue, it is mostly men that are the perpetrators (Levy, 2008).

Domestic violence occurs in varied contexts and degrees of severity but all infractions are placed under this one broad term. Legally, there are different levels of domestic violence ranging from emotional abuse to murder. Many people ask why a victim does not leave an abusive relationship (Ross, 2011). However, this is one crime that not only requires the victim be present to prove the crime; it also requires the victim to supply a past history of abuse. This often makes it impossible for victims of domestic violence to leave without fear of a chase. A victim may have to move thousands of miles away and still may be found and forced into a more violent situation than previously lived. This forces the victim into silence to avoid experiencing worse abuse than before she/he reported the crime. It also results in victims staying in abusive relationships because access to safety frequently appears inaccessible.

Women are more frequently victims of domestic violence, but this is not a crime limited to just women, men are affected as well (Ross). Even if a man is not being abused, he may witness abuse, which can be just as detrimental. Also, it is important to add that there has been a rise in incidences of domestic violence among and within lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. For gay men in particular, this creates new problems because many shelters are only for women who have experienced domestic violence. Gay men, and really, all male victims in general, are therefore left to find some other means of support.

Abusers abuse as a need to maintain all of the control and power in a relationship (Ross). This means that the victim is controlled through many facets of abuse such as emotional, financial, and physical circumstances. This is just another reason the victim is trapped in a less than ideal lifestyle that is logistically challenging to break free.

Throughout past generations, women have been property to men, leading to contemporary culture today that allows men to still contain this property behind closed doors (Ensler, 1998). Violence against women is directly related to domestic violence because women are usually the victims. However, the term violence against women leaves out an important word: “men”, as in men’s violence against women. Sadly, here the word woman becomes synonymous with the word victim.

Victims of domestic violence are not the only ones affected or caught in a cycle of abuse. Family, friends and children also are greatly impacted. Psychologically, victims are frequently brainwashed into the thoughts of the abuser. This continues the cycle of abuse in the future if not corrected and this type of controlling love can only be defined as destroying other humans through forceful caring. But in circumstances of abuse,

defining love in terms of a healthy love is nearly impossible, because it is dependent on the abuser involved. Domestic violence love creates this imbalance in power and control, which leads to detrimental side effects that include psychological and economic dependency that further a cycle of abuse (Ross).

So how does the victim get away? An escape plan usually takes time to plan and requires the help of others to accomplish. The planning could include putting money aside, deciding on an exact date and time to leave a residence, identifying a place to stay or go to, and having the support of others. Even if the victim is able to leave the abuser, there are always risks of the abuser finding the victim again. Laws protecting victims from repetitive abuse are frequently inadequate. Fifty percent of all abusers that are in prison are serving sentences for spousal abuse that resulted in murder. This demonstrates the inability of the law to protect victims in the beginning steps of abuse. To complicate matters further, statistics regarding domestic violence often fall under scrutiny because the statistics measure only quantifiable characteristics. This means that many conflicts relating to domestic violence are not adequately researched and documented because abuse data cannot always be put into quantifiable terms (Levy). Women studies research attempts to break the boundaries that male dominance has forced on society by exposing the prevalence of violence against women, both in intentional and socially constructed forms.

Sadly, victims of domestic violence are often forced to stay in abusive situations until punishable crimes occur, such as murder. The criminal justice system needs to aid these victims in a better way to ensure their safety. Domestic violence is a difficult crime to prevent because it is hard to stop a major offense before it happens and even more

challenging to legislate personal interactions in the private sphere of home. People surrounding a victim can help her/him to leave an abusive environment but they must also realize that immediate rescue is not viable most of the time. The crucial part of helping a victim is knowledge. Making more people aware of the issue of domestic violence will only make it easier for them to one day help a friend in that situation.

My women and gender studies senior seminar activist project, where I placed posters with trigger words about domestic violence in public restrooms, is one small step to raise awareness about this worldwide problem. So is my poem, *Silence Because of Fear*.

Bibliography

Ensler, E. (1998). *The vagina monologues*. New York: Villard.

Levy, B. (2008). *Women and violence*. Seal Press.

Ross, R. S. (2011). Because there won't be a "next time": Why Justice Court is an inappropriate forum for domestic violence cases. *Journal of Law and Family Studies*, 13(2), 329-343.

Fat Body Politics

Jeri Coleman

Fat, in terms of body size and composition, is one of many stigmatized identities. The stigmatization of fat is insidious in that it is not only the state of being fat that entails stigma, but the concept of fat. Fat is subjective, or socially constructed. While obesity is a “condition” that can be diagnosed, fat is often a position acquired by comparison. Society at large disparages people who can be classified as “obese” or even “overweight”, and within smaller social circles, the “fat” friend (by comparison) suffers the stigma (Nauert, 2011).

Since stigmatizing attitudes can be conditioned, ostracism may not be a conscious action. At the same time, conscious efforts of inclusion can still come off as insensitive, especially considering the framework and intricacy of fat stigmatization along with the complexity of actually existing in a fat body in a size discriminatory society. Fat stigma and ostracism can also be self-inflicted, usually by comparison and also unconsciously. Perhaps it is the stigmatization that many fat individuals do to themselves that contributes to the discrimination they face. Internal stigmatization can be devastating, but external stigmatization is truly harmful (Hope, 2011).

Occupying a stigmatized, or deviant, space dictates external manifestations of other non-deviant statuses (Butler, 1990). In the same vein, people may consider themselves qualified, based on their non-deviant status, to give unwarranted advice to those within deviant spaces. People take it upon themselves to make warnings, counsel, guide, or commend fat individuals, without solicitation, based on assumptions, merely because they are fat. Perhaps people police the bodies of fat individuals because they fear the deviancy of fat and all the negative associations with fat in themselves (Hope).

Shame does not effectively push people back into the acceptable limits of the hierarchy. Shame is more closely linked with issues like eating disorders and, yes, obesity, than it is of a healthy lifestyle. Someone subjected to bullying or even discrimination due to being fat is considered deserving of the harassment because their body is deviant and considered shameful (Koppelman, 2004). Another dichotomy can be constructed, this time with shame and comfort. The space defined by shame also encompasses confusion and embarrassment, while the space occupied by comfort also includes respect and positive esteem. This dichotomy can apply to anyone, including people who are not fat, just like how the concept of fat rather than an actual state of being evokes stigma (Murray, 2005).

The word “fat” itself has come to represent a variety of negative traits, such as undisciplined, ignorant, lazy, and ugly, etc. This is how it is possible for the concept of fat to evoke stigma. If someone perceives her/himself to possess the negative traits associated with fat, she/he may wrap all the negative traits into a neat package called “fat” without regard to body size or appearance. Using “fat” as a self-deprecating comment reinforces the “fat = bad” stigma, which can in turn debase the experiences of anyone larger than whoever uses “fat” against themselves in a negative tone (Giovanelli, 2009).

Furthermore, so many terms to describe fat exist that it is often conceptualized in the same way our society deals with sex – with both shame and fascination. Just like the countless euphemisms for genitals and sex, the adjectives used as synonyms for “fat” also function either as misrepresentations of reality, or as pretenses. The synonyms may try to exaggerate reality in either direction, or act as complete masks. At the same time, synonyms for fat give us a variety of terms and allow us to choose a term in which we find comfort and positive esteem to describe our bodies (Lamm, 1995).

The shame and stigmatization surrounding fat enables a disconnect between the body and mind of someone who is or perceives her/himself as fat. In other words, body-shaming and attacks on fat foster disassociation from the body. Bodies become things rather than a part of us and we lose bodily awareness. Instead of someone feeling safe in their body, instead of appreciating positive aspects of their physical being, they may regard their body with resentment (Garland-Thomas, 2001).

The intersections of fat and sex, and fat and violence, bring up deeper issues. The denial of the sexuality of fat individuals by society, along with the stigmatization and deviancy of a fat body provoke and construct taboo status around the intersection of fat and sex. Society also rejects the autonomy of fat individuals and devalues their bodies, which can result in making light of violence against fat individuals, especially sexual violence (Koppelman). Fat individuals are expected to be grateful for any attention they receive.

Fat and Health

The relationship between fat and health is often assumed to exist as a spectrum with the factors “fat” and “health” falling on opposite ends. In reality, fat and health are not opposite ends of the same spectrum. If only it were that simple. Society wants us to believe it is easy to direct our attention away from all the factors involved in being fat towards other behaviors such as diet and exercise.

There is more to weight than behaviors, but that is not to say that behaviors do not contribute to weight. Insisting that weight implies behaviors like poor diet and lack of exercise insinuates that other physical characteristics can imply related factors, such as genital size implying sexual activity, or nostril size implying how much someone picks their nose. The link between physical features and behaviors relates to stereotypes. The visual recognition of certain

physical features, such as height, perceived gender, skin color, and even hair color can signal stereotypes related to behaviors. Physical features may correlate to behaviors, but not exclusively (Giovannelli).

Likewise, the assumed inverse relationship between fat and health is inherently flawed on multiple levels. This concept reveals itself as obvious when the idea of “thin *and* unhealthy” comes into play, because we all know that it is possible to be thin *and* unhealthy. The funny thing about “obesity” and health is that many of the negative health issues related to obesity are merely correlations. While fat may exacerbate some health conditions, and it can serve as an indicator of others, not a single study has shown true causation in the sense that fat was the absolute sole cause of ill health (HBNS, 2007). Poor nutrition and lack of exercise cause health problems in all people, but body size does not determine health.

Health initiatives based on weight instead of health itself are also inherently flawed, not to mention they invariably fail. These health initiatives prioritize appearance and the confines of social acceptance over health, which can lead to more health issues rather than health fulfillment (Garland-Thomas). The focus on thin appearance as superior to fat creates a hierarchy in which fat is both synonymous with and indicative of bad health despite reality. This in turn sets up thin as superior no matter the circumstances, even if thinness is the result of an illness. If a thin person faces health issues because *they are too thin*, the dichotomy stands: at least they aren’t fat (Shenin, 1997).

Concurrently, a person who engages in disordered behaviors like self-starvation, excessive exercise, or general body and self-hatred is not considered worthy of help for their disordered behaviors if they are fat. A fat individual engaging in potentially dangerous or disordered behavior regarding their body and weight receives support in their attempts to change

their body. These behaviors, which can ruin a person's long-term health, redeems the fat individual in the space they occupy (HBNS).

Factors other than behaviors that contribute to both weight and health include genetics, knowledge and education, class status, the food industry, surplus, leisure, and the government. Genetics contributes to almost every physical characteristic. If a thin person were to claim, "I can eat and not exercise, and still not gain any weight", many people would believe this claim without a doubt. Just as there are naturally thin people, there are naturally fat people. Bodies have points of homeostasis, given adequate nutrition and activity, including fat bodies (Shenin).

The factors raised here that police or ridicule fat bodies all intersect in such a way that sometimes makes each factor indistinguishable from another. Our society has evolved into a creature characterized by a substantial food industry with an output of surplus also subsidized by the government to produce select products for a price cheaper than their true cost. The government and industry play off one another to maintain a class system in which people occupying lower class spaces are forced to subsist off subsidized products. Sadly, such products end up being unhealthy impositions, more often than not, chosen as a consequence to time constraints and/or inadequate resources to cook healthy options at home, and lack of access to information about alternative choices. Social constructions of "fat" identity, and fat body politics that stigmatize "fat," further trouble this phenomenon.

References

- Butler, J. (1990). Bodily inscriptions, performative subversions. In W. Kolmar & F. Bartkowski (Eds.). *Feminist theory: A reader* (pp. 496-503). New York: Routledge.
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2001). Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory. In W. Kolmar & F. Bartkowski (Eds.). *Feminist theory: A reader* (pp. 575-585). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Giovanelli, D., & Ostertag, S. (2009). Controlling the body: Media representations, body size, and self-discipline. In E. Rothblum & S. Solovay (Eds.). *The fat studies reader* (pp. 289-298). New York: NYU Press.
- Health Behavior News Service (HBNS). (2007, September 20). Many overweight teens have same eating disorders as thin peers. *Newswise*. <http://www.newswise.com/articles/many-overweight-teens-have-same-eating-disorders-as-thin-peers>
- Hope, J. (2011, May 6). The women who say they would rather be blind than fat. *Mail online*. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1384026/The-women-blind-fat.html>
- Koppelman, S. (2004, Nov/Dec). Fat women and abuse. *Off Our Backs*, 34(11/12), 27-29.
- Lamm, N. (1995). It's a big fat revolution. In B. Findlen (Ed.), *Listen up: Voices from the next feminist generation* (pp. 85-94). New York: Seal Press.
- Murray, S. (2005). (Un/be)coming out? Rethinking fat politics. *Social Semiotics*, 15(2), 153-163.
- Nauert, R. (2011, August 18). Cultural messages lead to fat stigma. *Psych Central*. <http://psychcentral.com/news/2011/08/18/cultural-messages-lead-to-fat-stigma/28691.html>
- Shenin, R. (1997, March/April). Body shame: The shaming of women. *Healthy Weight Journal*, 11(2), 37.

Medicine and Transgender Identities

Poet/Artist Statement

Johnny Sparrow

I am a senior double majoring in women and gender studies and psychology. I plan to pursue a master in social work with an emphasis on gender studies so I will be able to work with the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) community. One of my biggest influences when it comes to feminist theory is Michel Foucault (1980), Judith Butler (1999), and Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (2005). Through theory, I have finally found a place to put my questions to good use. Butler's (1999) idea that gender is not something we are at birth, but something every person puts on to go about in society is a theory that made it easier for me to function every day. It gave me a scope to see myself through. Butler (1999) captures this best in her book *Gender Trouble*:

Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all (p. 140).

When asked to contribute to the first ever online journal for The College at Brockport's Woman and Gender Studies Senior Seminar, there was no question that I wanted to write about a topic that is close to my heart in a way that would expose others to this very urgent call to action. I choose to shine a light on being transgender and specifically, the lack of medical care and health insurance coverage for what is labeled as "Gender Identity Disorder" in the *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) (2000). This term is controversial. Many transgender people feel this term is a way to say that being transgender is a mental illness

that needs to be corrected or fixed. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson (2005) explains the western world looks at disability in a way that mirrors many of the same ideas patriarchy has on transgender individuals.

Women with disabilities, even more intensely than women in general, have been cast in the collective cultural imagination as inferior, lacking, excessive, incapable, unfit, and useless. In contrast to normatively feminine women, women with disabilities are often stereotypically considered undesirable, asexual, and unsuitable as parents (p. 1567).

It is the great strain of being able to survive when your body doesn't match your spirit. The greatest challenge is the struggle from within to know who you are and fight your way in this world to be you. This is represented by Foucault's statement, "...if you are not like everybody else, then you are abnormal, if you are abnormal, then you are sick. These three categories, not being like everybody else, not being normal and being sick are in fact very different but have been reduced to the same thing" (O'Farrell, 2010).

Poem

Plague

Plague Doctor comes to visit me.
He holds my hand that shakes
He sees my spotted soul quarantined
in here
through goggles caked with disease, blackness
and rejection.

I've sat inside this box,
blinded by darkness that is occasionally broken up
by pinholes of light.

I've been here 25 years
waiting to die,
waiting for a cure.
Wanting to rip this sickness out of my head
off my body
These tumors grow larger
every time I breathe.

I ask the Dr of death to help,
to cut me from I
let spirit fall out
let the body purge itself from toxins,
from something that is more than this.

He's the only one who comes to see me.

He's the only one who comes to see this atrocity of error in nature,

cuts and seeping wounds.
My body is punctured with needles
like Jesus was punctured with nails.
He died for the sins of others and I
have lived with the sins of others.
My body is scorned and stripped down
to its most natural form
but I carry a heavy cross as well.

I carry the weight of wrongness, shamefulness and hateful disgust.

I don't have a father to save me, or a mother that weeps at my feet.

I've tried to cut the swelling and sore lumps from this chest,
only to be infected and called crazy.
The raven masked man is here now,
here to make it stop here to make me whole by taking away.
Looking into the hooded and dark eyes
I count backwards, leaving exactly how I came into this world
pure, unmarked by fate and wounded wings of gender.
He patched me up where the scars cut across my torso.
He gave me life when everyone else thought I died.
Plague Doctor see's me like I see I.
Wings corrected and back straightened to fly up and out
blinded by sky
up where
I am alone as I descend to my heaven,
to my new body.

Abstract

I wrote the poem "Plague" as a reflection about healthcare and the "sickness" a transgender individual may feel when there is no apparent way to become a functional individual in society because of the way society quarantines individuals who fall into the margins. Many states do not have laws protecting individuals from being fired or not even hired because they are transgender. There are very few companies that provide health insurance for transgender individuals.

In addition to being denied health insurance coverage, you may experience gender identity- related health care discrimination when seeking care and services from doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and/or other health care providers (such as acupuncturists, chiropractors, or mental health therapists). Gender identity

discrimination can also occur in residential/long-term care facilities (such as mental health or drug treatment facilities) and public health community-based organizations (such as HIV prevention agencies) (Transgender Law Center, 2011, p. 3).

Although many health insurance providers can deny you insurance coverage if they find out you are transgender through medical records, very few providers cover hormones and sexual reassignment surgery. In most states and for federal government purposes, transgender people cannot get the sex marker (i.e., “Male” or “Female”) changed on their identity papers (e.g., birth certificates, drivers’ licenses) without proof of some form of surgery. A few states, such as Massachusetts and New Jersey, will allow changes to drivers’ licenses with medical documentation short of surgery (Fenway Health, 2010, p. 13)..

”Plague” also speaks about depression and the corners of someone’s mind when she/he is at the lowest point. The poem also hints of suicide which is way too prevalent, especially in transgender youth. In writing this poem, I considered Eli Shipley’s poem “Etymology”. This poem reveals the religious experience of Eli when injecting testosterone and his feelings about being transgender. The poem influenced my writing about being transgendered and how religion affects my thinking. I have included Shipley’s poem so you might understand how it informs my poem.

Etymology (Shipley)

Testosterone, strange that you’d let me
give birth
to my own body

even though I know I’ve always been
a boy, moving
toward what? Manhood? A constant

puberty? I could replace my menses
with a thick needle
filled with your fluid, thrust every

two weeks the rest of my life
into my thigh. And I think
of the six days of creation before

god rested, because I too am tired
and because my voice, would it suddenly be
god-like to me, thundering,

waking in a deep vibrato as if from atop
a mountain, maybe Olympus, maybe
a lightning bolt shot sharp

through my heart because I am
startled, scared, delighted? Testosterone,
you are the Magnetic

Fields, Elvis, and molasses, the first time
I heard Nina Simone sing, unsure of her
and my own sex at the age of 13. You are

an eighteen-wheeler ripping through
a hail storm, the umpire breathing
over the catchers's shoulder until

the ball burns into the mitt
and there is a deep growl
ascending, Strike one!

And I am struck
hard by the beauty of you. I am
again an eight- year- old boy, simply

admiring a tree in the school-yard, my only
friend, who lifts me
and lifts me so that I can pick

its single spring
flower, the lowest one, maybe
for my mother, maybe my father-

but end up placing it inside
my first and only dictionary, a gift
from my father on the first day

of that school year. And later
when it has dried, wilted, I
remove it. Only a stain left, small

shadow, the handprint
of a child quieting the words
it covers, tucks into his

memory, already knows by heart, and keeps there, where they wait for him
until he is ready.

Painting/Mixed Media



Enter Death, Exit Cure by Johnny Sparrow



Abstract

I painted “Enter Death, Exit Cure” as support for my poem “Plague”. It is a visual representation of the words and thoughts of someone, struggling with the idea that the body that they want is so far away, it may as well be a god. In this case, the painting and poem are my own story. Many have a hard time believing in something when you can’t see or touch it, and that’s exactly the hopelessness I felt. Importantly, not every trans identified individual has these thoughts, feelings and desires. Some are perfectly happy with the body they were born into.

Whether you are comfortable in your skin or not, there is a need for improved transgender healthcare. Doctors should not treat us like we have the plague, but learn about our needs and concerns. This is important to any transgender person.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, fourth edition: DSM-IV*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Fenway Health. (2010). Glossary of gender and transgender terms.
http://www.fenwayhealth.org/site/DocServer/Handout_7-C_Glossary_of_Gender_and_Transgender_Terms_fi.pdf
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality (Vol. 1): An introduction*. New York: Vintage.
- Garland-Thomson, R. (2005, Winter). Feminist disability studies. *Signs*, 30(2), 1557-1587. [doi:](https://doi.org/10.1086/423352) 10.1086/423352
- Lombardi, E. (2001, June). Enhancing transgender health care. *American Journal of Public Health*, 91(6), 869-872.
- O'Farrell, C. (2010). Quotes of the month (2005-7): January 2006. Retrieved from <http://www.michel-foucault.com/quote/2005q.html>
- Shipley, E. (2008). *Boy with flowers*. New York: Barrow Street Press.
- Transgender Law Center. (2004, July). Transgender health and the law: Identifying and fighting health care discrimination. Retrieved from transgenderlawcenter.org/pdf/Health%20Law%20fact%20sheet.pdf

Sexual Assault on the College Campus

Brittney Rowe

A college campus is a very unique place. There is a flow of independence throughout the student body that is both terrifying and spectacular at the same time. It is spectacular because of the growth of knowledge and an ability to act on it, terrifying because sexual assault is one area of knowledge that has now engrained itself in my brain. Sexual assault can be found anywhere, yet when studying a college campus, the rates of attempted or completed sexual assault, one in four students, rank much higher than in other settings (Foubert, Tatum & Godin, 2010). To grasp students' ideas and knowledge base per sexual assault issues on college campuses, I circulated a small journal around campus where I prompted students to anonymously respond to scripted passages on or about incidences of sexual violence. It is important for those who read this piece to gain knowledge from the personal words of students. These voices, presented as a progressive narrative, follow:

One in Four: Rape and Sexual Assault on Campus

One in four is such an alarming statistic! That means in every one of my classes there are going to be women who have dealt with sexual assault. I cannot imagine dealing with this issue in such a fishbowl environment, having to face your attacker, having to tell so many people...

This ratio is very alarming. There needs to be more that's done to help women, or anyone, ... on a college campus avoid these horrible situations....I think that violence against women does not get the attention that is needed. Why are we not in crisis mode about this... If this is the case, while males are the majority of these assailants on women, then how are these men being so ignorant...

Many students are also currently, if not in the process of moving off of campus. Yes many sexual assaults occur on campus, but students under age and of age, go off campus to drink and lose control of what they want etc. → Why don't we consider off campus where many horrible things occur as well...

My friend Dan met a guy and took him home because they were having fun and things seemed normal. While making out this

acquaintance pulled out a gun. Dan lied [sic] there in fear and was raped. Though not "forcefully" he was raped. He is waiting to find out if he got AIDS (rapist didn't wear a condom). I am terrified. This is my best friend....

Numerous women on this campus feel as if they have been raped and/or sexually assaulted but refuse to do anything because they believe it's their fault for being so drunk....

Rape is perpetuated as something accepted that happens to everyone all the time and everyone should just deal with it. It is seen as something men are supposed to do and women need to guard against and nothing needs to be done about it....

I have followed this rape cycle my entire adolescent/adult life. I thought I was smart to be preventative/cautious as a woman until I was raped, by my friend who I knew for years. Thankfully, with the help of God in my life, I forgave him and myself and restored that piece of myself. In a way that experience patted my career choice as I will counsel men/women (victims) and offenders as a mental health counselor. It's critical to be aware that most rapes do not occur behind the bushes by a stranger or that women are always the targets. It's also of critical importance to know that forgiveness heals all wounds in time....

I don't think a mini shirt is what causes rape. Generally, how the girl is acting while wearing the mini skirt will cause rape. Although these indicators of rape seem accurate, anyone can be raped....

I think that sexual assault is influenced by what people wear because people still wonder what a woman was wearing if/when she was assaulted. I think it's a little too brash to say how a girl was acting caused rape because you can get assaulted at any time doing anything or nothing. It's important to know that rape is apart if sexual assault, but assault can mean other things as well and is not just encompassed by being raped....

The only thing that causes rape are rapists. Not how the victim's acts. Not what the victim wears. Not what the victim does or does not do. The person responsible for the rape is the rapist, but quiet often that's not where the responsibility is placed....

Scared, embarrassed, threatened, shamed, don't think they'll be believed....

A lot of victims blame themselves. It is easier to put things on me, instead of on someone else that now scares the shit out of you. You know? This makes sense. If I was at fault, I can punish myself and move on...I wouldn't want to give a lot of that trusted power to someone....

If most victims know the person that raped them, they may not want to report the case. My friend was raped by her family friend that babysat her, this has caused a huge impact on her love and

*relationship life today, but her family does not know, and she never reported the continuous rapes while he babysat her....
The fact that a rapist is someone you know makes me not want male friends just because they could think my friendship means more.
Then having that mis-communication turn into rape....
I am fearful of being friends with men. I am a rape victim and I was sexually assaulted by a man I was friends with. I was only 16 years old. The trauma of being raped is still with me today that I constantly find myself straying from my male counter parts. I find that many of my male friends have crushes on me or find me physically attractive. I am usually with that being said, I am constantly afraid of them trying to get physical without my validation. Rape has caused me to not trust men, especially the ones I know very well....A woman should be able to wear whatever she wants without having to worry about being judged by men, therefore sexual assault is definitely not justified by revealing clothing.*

Rape and Sexual Assault in Context

Research tells us one out of four college women are sexually assaulted on college campuses (Office on Violence Against Women, 2012). Sexual assault can impact anyone; this is not a women-only phenomenon. Men may be sexually assaulted as well, there are just lower statistics reported for it. Variables associated with college-aged rape and sexual assault are many.

With a newfound sense of independence, college freshmen have a vast amount of new resources available to them. One of these is alcohol, which can play a large socialization role as groups of students acclimate themselves to campus life. Sadly, violence, and sexual assault correlate with alcohol use. Researchers have begun to study the connection between the use of alcohol and incidences of sexual assault (Abbey, 2002). Campus culture can normalize sexual assault with behaviors, language, and the active interaction between coed groups that hides sexual transgressions. Jokes and the way teens talk can bring a victimizing nature towards women, which reinforces rape culture.

There are multiple triggers embedded into our society at large, particularly in media, which reproduce rape behaviors. Magazine covers broadcasting terms like “sex sells” along with provocative, sexualized images of women, are prevalent to supermarket checkout aisles. Are these images of women dressed in scantily clad clothing empowering, or does the media’s use of sexualized images encourage sexual assault and pornographic objectification?

With the prevalence of sexual assault many women unconsciously navigate their lives dictated by a “rape schedule,” which is the idea that women consciously or unconsciously do things throughout their day in accordance with their beliefs and ideas of when and how rape occurs (Yin, 2011). Holding your keys between your fingers in defense while walking to your car at night is an example of navigating your movements with rape in mind. Rape culture spawns beliefs and stereotypes about rape behaviors and causes. Among these ideas is the act of “victim blaming”, a phrase that explains the act of taking ridicule and blame off of the accused or perpetrator and in turn placing it back on the victim (M., 2010). A person seeking to reason why a rape has happened to a loved one may ask the victim what she/he was doing to cause the rape. Was the victim drinking or dressed promiscuously?

No one should be sexually assaulted, but rape can happen to anyone whether single, married, lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans identified. In heterosexual relationships until the 1970s, a woman could not accuse her husband of sexual assault because it was seen as part of a wifely duty to have sex with her husband (Mahoney & Williams, n.d.). However, no matter what relationship position you are in, your body is yours alone with which to decide with whom you have sex.

Sexual assault is the most under reported crime (Office on Violence Against Women). A well-known case is that of Jeanne Clery, a college freshman raped and murdered in her bed at

Lehigh University in 1986. Her parents later uncovered that the university had failed to report 38 other violent crimes that had occurred on campus, crimes that would have restricted their daughter from attending the university. Due to their efforts, the Clery Act was passed in 1990. The Act mandates all federally funded college campuses to compile all crimes that had occurred in that year by October 1st of every year. The reports must be visible to anyone seeking the information (University Police, 2011). The College at Brockport's report can be found directly on the campus safety webpage, but the reporting numbers are very low. If one in four college women are affected by sexual assault, the numbers do not add up. In the last three years, Brockport reported four, two, and three assaults respectively each year (University Police, p. 18).

Survivors of sexual assault may choose one of many reasons not to report what has happened to them. Some perpetrators threaten their victim saying either their family or the victim will be hurt if they tell anyone what has happened. Others may fear that friends of the accused may re-victimize the individual through comments or actions in retaliation for what their friend is being accused of. Another cruel fact is the perpetrator may be a member of the victim's family, someone they're supposed to be able to trust and love (RAINN, 2009).

Rape myths, as stereotypes or untrue reasoning about rape, reinforce rape culture by contributing to low rates of victims reporting rape and by perpetuating violence through media and language that reinforces rape behaviors. These widespread false beliefs about rape tally up to walls survivors have to break down to continue with their lives (Smith, 2010). One specific rape myth is that a rapist is a stranger who jumps out from the bushes as you pass by at night. In actuality, acquaintance rape, where most victims know the perpetrator, is a far more common rape phenomenon.

On a college campus there could be a multitude of things students fear. Sexual assault is one I think students should be educated on more frequently. Despite a good amount of knowledge at Brockport, there appears to be a lack of awareness about rape across the campus. In personal trainings and conversations with people about my internship work with campus sexual assault prevention, most are surprised that rape could be happening here at Brockport. For example, I felt a role reversal when talking with my teacher about presenting on this topic at Scholars Day. She asked whether it was really necessary for me to be addressing sexual assault on this campus as part of the work I was performing in my internship. She didn't think it was something that was happening here. For these reasons, rape and sexual assault should continue to be addressed and educated campus wide.

References

- Abbey, A. (2002). Alcohol-related sexual assault: A common problem among college students. *Journal of Studies On Alcohol. Supplement*, 63, 118.
- Foubert, J. D., Tatum, J. L., & Godin, E. E. (2010). First-year male students' perceptions of a rape prevention program 7 months after their participation: Attitude and behavior changes. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(6), 707-715. doi: 10.1353/csd.2010.0021
- M., E. M. (2010, March 15). Rape crisis information research pathfinder: Victim blame. Retrieved from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill website: <http://www.ibiblio.org/rcip/vb.html>
- Mahoney, P., & Williams, L. M. (n.d.). Sexual assault in marriage: Prevalence, consequences, and treatment of wife rape. Retrieved from http://www.ncdsv.org/images/nnfr_partnerviolence_a20-yearliteraturereviewandsynthesis.pdf
- Office on Violence Against Women. (2012, January). Sexual assault. Retrieved from the United States Department of Justice website: <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/sexassault.htm>
- RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network). (2009). Reporting rape. Retrieved from <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/legal-information/reporting-rape>
- Smith, C. (2010, February 25). Overwhelmed and unsure, victims often delay seeking help. *Investigate West*. Retrieved from <http://www.invw.org/node/938>

University Police. (2011, September). Campus safety report. Retrieved from The College at Brockport State University of New York website:

http://www.brockport.edu/policies/docs/campus_safety_report_clery_act_and_campus_crime_statistics.pdf

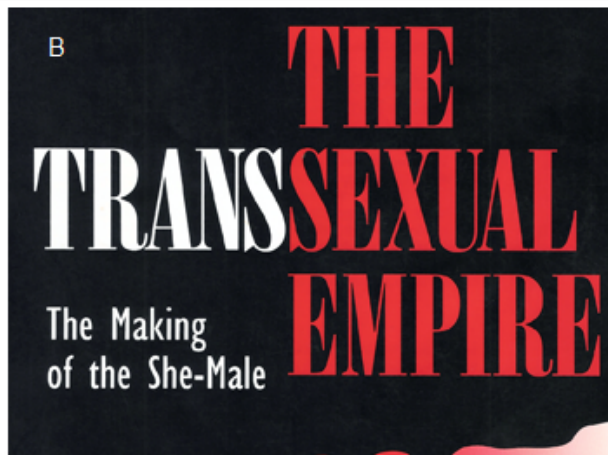
Yin, J. (2011, July 13). Saying no to a 'rape schedule' [Web log message]. Retrieved from

<http://nakasec.org/blog/2631>

Anti-Trans Hatred

in the Name of Feminism

by Max Kurzdorfer



Please leave a comment, but be aware that if it contains the words "cis", "intersecting", "sex-positive", "dialogue" or "constructive" it will be deleted automatically.

Enter your comment here...



MANSPLAININ' & TRANSPPLAININ'

It's all the same thing

F

The Internet has allowed everyone with access to have a public space to make their voices heard. These include voices that may not seem legitimate or accepted by mainstream culture that would have difficulty finding a place in mainstream media or academia. These new opportunities help marginalized individuals who want to tell about their lives and experiences, but they also help groups spread hatred and vitriol against those marginalized.

While spending time on the Internet, I have come across groups of people identifying themselves as radical feminists who use their resources to spread hatred against trans people. This collage is a collection of words and images I have come across. I will explain each of these images, which I have lettered A-F, and their significance.

Discussion in this article will include some jargon specific to the radical feminist communities I have investigated. I will explain terms when they come up, but have not found specific origins for them. While it may seem at times that certain terms require a citation, to this sub-culture, this vocabulary is common knowledge.

Image A shows a woman's pelvic region wearing a pair of white cotton underwear. There is writing on the underwear, which reads “The Cotton Ceiling™ - Preventing males from “curing lesbians” since forever! ♀♀” This image was posted by user GallusMag on the blog “Gender Trender”, a radical feminist, anti-trans discussion group, on March 25, 2012. The cotton ceiling is a term put forth by pornography actress Drew Devreaux that refers to the pattern she has observed of queer cisgender women rejecting trans women sexually (Faucette, 2012). It derives from the familiar feminist term glass ceiling, the invisible barrier that keeps women on the lower levels of employment.

While trans women have been accepted in some lesbian spaces, they are not seen as

potential partners due to the radical feminist social expectation of maintaining exclusively female bodied partnerships. This social expectation is rooted in the belief that trans women remain men despite their gender identity. To this social group, committing to a relationship with a trans woman would be equivalent to adhering to the patriarchal standards of a nuclear family. Radical lesbian feminists are known to combat the patriarchal model by existing in lesbian relationships. Therefore, a radical lesbian feminist dating a trans woman would become ostracized by the social group and seen as a traitor and as someone who has been unable to fight the motives of the ruling male class.

“Curing” a lesbian, in mainstream culture, means to rape a lesbian in order to prove that she can be straightened out by a real man. This terminology insinuates that trans women are men fraudulently representing themselves as women to break into lesbian social circles for the purpose of raping them and turning them straight. Image A accuses trans women of acting as women for the purpose of forcing radical lesbian feminists to adhere to patriarchal standards.

Image B is the cover of Janis Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire* (1994). This was found in its entirety on the blog “Rancom” on December 30, 2011. Although Raymond’s piece is often seen as currently irrelevant within academia, its presence on this blog and the many references to these ideas shows that it is still an influential piece to some crowds of people. Raymond’s entire piece was posted for the purpose of supporting the views, opinions, and mission of the “Rancom” blog. *The Transsexual Empire* is about Raymond’s views of transsexualism, trans women, and the transsexual empire, which refers to the psychological establishment, the medical establishment, and the ways in which they make transsexualism possible. Raymond believes that trans women are and will always be men. She refers to trans

women either with masculine pronouns or with feminine pronouns in scare quotes, including Christine Jorgensen (p. 21) and Jan Morris (p. 88). She calls trans surgeries “a creation of men, initially developed for men” (p. 26) and refers to trans women as “constructed females” (p. 71). These ideas have come up again and again.

Image C is the caption on the comment section of the blog “Rancom”. It reads “Please leave a comment, but be aware that if it contains the words ‘cis’, ‘intersecting’, ‘sex-positive’, ‘dialogue’ or ‘constructive’, it will be deleted automatically” (Rancom!, 2012). The word cis refers to cisgender, meaning someone who is not transgender. To disallow this word would create the circumstance that this word is used to avoid. If a commenter cannot say cis, the options left are non-trans and normal. Both of these options situate trans people in a lower status than cis people.

Intersectionality is a feminist theory that describes ways that different oppressions work together in different ways and do not act independently of each other. By refusing to allow this word, the blog owner and readers are enforcing a climate in which they can comfortably ignore their own privileges, in particular, cisgender privilege, without hearing any critiques. Sex-positive is another branch of feminism that differs from the viewpoints on this blog, and the words “dialogue” and “constructive” are words used when people are trying to have a conversation with multiple sides. This comment box asks readers to please comment, but disallows them to comment if they do not agree with the prevailing opinions of the space.

This statement means that this group of radical feminists on the Internet, or those identified as such, are unwilling to accept the position of others as positions of subjective knowledge. Opposing viewpoints are unwanted. Ignoring the experiences of others and

invalidating and lessening these individuals leaves the subject area incomplete. If both sides of the argument are not heard, a balanced viewpoint will not be had. Considering these groups are all fighting for basic rights, very little activism can actually take place until the internal activists come to a middle ground. Without a common respect and understanding of human difference within the oppressed group, there will simply be no progress toward the greater goal.

Image D was titled “Privilege Denying M2F” from the Facebook page, “Telling Women to Smile Is Sexist” (Mantis, 2012). It is a picture of a smug looking man wearing garish, poorly applied makeup. Around the image are the words “Transphobe! Your spaces exclude me. Don't you know women have privilege?” This image in its original form is known as the meme “Privilege Denying Dude”. Privilege Denying Dude’s original purpose was to point out the many ways men deny their social privilege. This new version, with makeup crudely added with an image manipulation program, is meant to be a joke about trans women’s position in the gender privilege system. This image is meant to say that trans women are and always will be men, both in opinions and appearances. By making these claims, the author completely denies the femininity and gender identification of trans women and invalidates their expression and sense of self.

The words on this image deny cisgender privilege and imply that cisgender women do not have any kind of gender privilege because their oppression is the only true oppressed experience. This author does not believe that cisgender privilege exists, which ignores the very real discrimination and oppression that trans people face each day. Since I began this project, this image has been removed from Facebook.

Image E is a picture of assorted shrubbery with the words “piss somewhere else, i don't

care where” (FCM, 2011). The image was found on the blog “Scum-o-Rama”, a radical feminist blog with a title that plays on the term radscum. Radscum is a derogatory term for anti-trans radical feminists used by some groups of feminists with opposing viewpoints, including trans women. This blog’s main purpose is to address varied feminist topics along with trans debates using images and writings.

This image dismisses the basic human need all people have for a bathroom, saying that the poster is not concerned with where a trans woman goes to the bathroom, as long as it's not the ladies' room. The post accompanying this picture refers to trans women as “MAABs” and “M2Ts”, meaning Male Assigned At Birth and Male to Transsexual. This language says that trans women are not women and can never be women, reducing them to sex assigned at birth and saying they will always be men. If they are men, it therefore makes sense to tell them to go urinate on plants when they do not want to use the men’s bathroom. This post also reflects the trope that trans women are men that want to enter women's bathrooms to have access to women to rape. This is one of the most hateful misconceptions and seems to be completely hypothetical, as I have been unable to find a single instance of a cited incident of a trans woman sexually assaulting a cis woman in a bathroom. Bringing up this straw man argument allows the poster to ignore the issues of trans women simply because they do not want to share their bathroom. This image takes the real issue of violence against trans women and the danger they face in men’s bathrooms and turns the issue into a false accusation against trans women. This accusation completely dismisses the discrimination and daily struggle and hate trans women face. This post is also a strong reminder of the harsh exclusivity of radical lesbian feminist groups.

Image F is the headline for the blog “Mansplainin' and Transplainin'”. This blog uses

quotes from trans women to ridicule their positions. In this blog, trans women are referred to as M2T, for the same reasons as the previous blog. While it does not say trans women-splainin', trans men are not included in this blog. This blog exists for the sole purpose of forming hate speech and hurting others.

Mansplaining is a term originally used to coin a man explaining something from the position of power as a man, to a woman in a condescending manner. The “About” section of the blog states “M2T are men, ergo, transplainin’ is mansplainin’ — but don’t take our word for it, check out their very own splainin’ right here on this very blog!!” (Mansplainin’ and Transplainin’, 2012). Comparing mansplaining to a statement a trans individual makes denies the privilege cisgender people have over trans women. This includes both cis men and women. “Mansplainin’ and Transplainin’” is yet another blog designed to dismiss the gender identity of trans people, especially trans women, and to deny their experience as oppressed people.

Although this is a small, specific group of people on the Internet, hate in the name of feminism exists. Groups of people are using the feminist identity to hurt others and deny the validity of another’s experience. This level of disrespect and hate is detrimental to the feminist movement. It is important to keep in mind the role anonymity plays in Internet discussion groups. With the exception of a few prominent authors who post for the purpose of making a name for themselves, most people post anonymously or use a pseudonym in these forums. It is much easier to spread hate when a person cannot be called out individually as hateful. This is a major reason that hate on the Internet is so pervasive. These popular images highlight the attacks on the trans community.

References

- Faucette, A. (2012, March 27). The Cotton ceiling is real and it's time for all queer and trans people to fight back [Web log message]. Queer feminism. Retrieved from <http://queerfeminism.com/2012/03/27/the-cotton-ceiling-is-real-and-its-time-for-all-queer-and-trans-people-to-fight-back/>
- FCM. (2011, May 1). Piss-e [image]. Retrieved from <http://scumorama.wordpress.com/2011/05/01/a-graphic-response-2/>
- GallusMag. (2012, March 25). The cotton ceiling [photograph]. Retrieved from <http://gendertrender.wordpress.com/2012/03/25/the-cotton-ceiling/>
- Mansplainin' & transplainin'. (2012, May 6). Retrieved from <http://mansplaintransplain.wordpress.com/>
- Mantis, M. (2012, March). Telling women to smile is sexist [Web log post]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Telling-Women-to-Smile-is-Sexist/243300992382631>
- Rancom!. (2011, December 30). Please leave a comment [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://rancom.wordpress.com/2011/11/17/separatism/>
- Raymond, J. (1994). *The transsexual empire: the making of the she-male* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.mediafire.com/?djh299d75nnmcyo>



The College at
BROCKPORT
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



**WOMEN AND GENDER STUDIES
PROGRAM**

Cover image, *Enter Death, Exit Cure*, by Johnny Sparrow

